



unattributed (from internet)

West Midlands Rural Community Council Network: Including Disadvantaged People

Introduction

This paper has been prepared as part of the West Midlands RCC Network's delivery of RSEF projects. It draws on the experience of the Rural Community Development Workers' Project. In 2002 the Countryside Agency made funding available to Rural Community Councils to appoint community development workers to work specifically on issues of rural social exclusion. There are four rural community development workers in the West Midlands region, employed by Rural Community Councils in Herefordshire, Shropshire, Staffordshire and Warwickshire.

This paper draws on their experience over the past two and a half years, and aims to provide analysis, practical tools and ideas for the voluntary and community sector to operate more inclusively. The paper will:

- Define 'disadvantaged' in rural areas
- Provide good practice examples of how the voluntary and community sector can operate more inclusively, and to
- Suggest tools and practical solutions to achieve diversity.

The project has grown in the writing, because the examples of exercises, case studies and techniques of engagement had increasing throughout the life of the project.

“Everyone should have an opportunity to be involved in consultation and contribute . . . ”

Rural Strategic Engagement Fund 2

The Network has secured £171,002 through the Regional Strategic Engagement Fund (RSEF) to assist the partnership of rural community councils develop their engagement in regional policy and strategy development.

The fund, made possible by grants of £2.072 million from AWM and other partners, is managed by RAWM with an aim to 'provide capacity building support to regionally significant communities/communities of interest to enable them to engage in regional policy and strategy development'.

Under the rural theme, the Network will now be in a better position to reflect the needs and views of local rural communities to those who are making decisions about strategic planning. The objectives of the Network are to increase the opportunity for consulting and listening to rural needs, develop tools for gathering issues raised locally and representing a regional picture whilst assisting local communities understand the regional agenda and feel able to influence it.

This paper is one of a series of policy papers produced by the West Midlands RCC Network covering a range of topics. For a list see reverse, for hard copies contact the Network Co-ordinator, 01684 580862 or visit www.wmrccn.org.uk to download.

PART ONE – Definitions, context and process

Definitions:

Disadvantage

The term disadvantage is capable of wide interpretation. People experiencing disadvantage may include black people, women, disabled people, lesbians and gay men, older and younger people, people with HIV and AIDS, and working class people among others. However, not all individuals will be disadvantaged, and no one group is more important than any of the others. Not everyone who may be seen as belonging to one of these groups will define themselves as disadvantaged and it is patronising and potentially discriminatory to assume that any individual should be defined by others because they are perceived as having characteristics which are usually shared by members of a particular group.

Such a classification ignores the complex and changing nature of our lives. Many people will experience discrimination for more than one reason, and at different times in their lives. It also creates the possibility that discriminations can be ranked, and one issue seen as more important or worthy of attention than another. For all these reasons it is important to see discrimination working as an interlocking web which may affect some of us all the time and all of us at different times, as either oppressor or oppressed.

Social inclusion

Disadvantage is at the centre of the concept of social inclusion, which is itself at the core of much of the Government's recent domestic social policy initiatives. The concept was summarised by the Deputy Prime Minister in the "Inclusion" Newsletter, Autumn 2002 as; "... about creating thriving, inclusive and sustainable communities which meet everyone's



needs, no matter where they live or who they are."

Social exclusion

Social inclusion is defined in contrast to social exclusion, which has been described by the Social Exclusion Unit as; "... a relatively new term in British policy debate. ..." It includes poverty and low income, but is broader and addresses some of the wider causes and consequences of poverty. The Government has defined social exclusion as; "*a shorthand term for what can happen when people or areas suffer from a combination of linked problems such as unemployment, poor skills, low incomes, poor housing, high crime, bad health and family breakdown.*"

Equality of opportunity

Equality of opportunity is central to much of Government policy, and is based on an approach which seeks to change the existing balance of power and influence in society through making changes in institutional policies and procedures. It is based on the idea that in order to enable disadvantaged groups to achieve a more equitable share of power and resources, organisations and society need rules of behaviour to create a more level playing field and thus allow access for marginalised and less powerful people. It assumes that everybody can achieve their full potential as long as they are given the same starting point. Institutions, decision-making processes and power structures are seen as open to and capable of reform.

There is an alternative view of equality of opportunity and anti-discriminatory practice, which focuses more on outcomes than on policies and procedures. In this view, the present structure of society is incapable of providing a fair distribution of power and resources. Positive action or positive discrimination is advocated in order to secure a shift in the distribution of power and resources.

In practice, the language used to discuss equal opportunities frequently fails to distinguish between the different starting points, which can lead to misunderstanding and disillusionment with particular outcomes, as well as a mistrust of all equalities work. In order to avoid this possibility, it is important to be clear about the aims and methods of equalities work with communities.

Hard to reach groups

Social inclusion implies the involvement of all sections of diverse communities in the processes of local consultation, politics and community engagement. However, there are substantial numbers of people

who are not involved in these processes, either because they are disempowered or because they choose not to be engaged.

The term "hard to reach" is frequently used as to describe people who have little or no apparent engagement with mainstream agencies, are often perceived as socially excluded, and whose cultures may not encourage engagement with political and mainstream community processes. Working with "hard to reach" groups is often seen by agencies as challenging and difficult, and often by paid workers as threatening and frustrating.

This view is based on assumptions about normal attitudes and behaviour. It tends to presume that the main (sometimes the only) means of working with such people is through paid workers or through community leaders who are part of the mainstream agenda. It often assumes that people ought to want to engage, and that they will have an interest in their communities and in local plans and initiatives.

An alternative view, strongly endorsed at a national conference of the Standing Conference on Community Development in September 2002, is that there are no "hard to reach" groups; only inappropriate means of doing so.

Disadvantage in rural areas

"Care should be taken to approaches that map poverty and deprivation. Such approaches can lead to focusing on areas of greatest incidence, when research shows that significant numbers of 'at risk' groups are also located outside these areas..." (Shropshire County Council "Poverty and Deprivation in Shropshire" 1995) This caveat is still applicable ten years on.

Rural social exclusion is different from that in conurbations in that disadvantaged people are likely to live in greater isolation, both geographically and socially, than their urban counterparts. There are few examples of geographical communities in rural locations who share experience of ethnic origins, lesbian or gay sexual orientation, disability, etc. Lack of access to public transport, the high cost of housing, and other well-documented economic and social costs of rural life are likely to impact disproportionately on people experiencing social exclusion and disadvantage.

There is a paucity of appropriate "hard" evidence about disadvantage and deprivation in rural communities. In analysing rural social exclusion, official statistics suffer from several defects. Among these are:

- Many are based on ward-level analysis, which precludes consideration of the smaller-scale incidence of discrimination or social exclusion which characterises much rural experience
- There is a strong likelihood that many people living in rural communities do not report harassment or discrimination, and do not take up entitlements to benefits or support. There is therefore probably high under-representation of claimants in the statistics
- Some of the indicators used in the statistics are inappropriate to rural contexts. For example, the level of car ownership used as one measure of deprivation or exclusion fails to recognise that rural people will prioritise car ownership more highly than in an urban environment, regardless of income
- Agencies with a rural brief often focus resources and time on working in relatively larger population centres, frequently because of the difficulties outlined above in identifying needs in the rural hinterland.

Principles of effective work with disadvantaged rural people

There are important aspects of working with all people and groups, which should be considered well before any work is started. Where a group is not engaged with the mainstream, these assume an even greater significance. They include questions about both context and process of the work.

Context:

- Whose agenda is driving the project?
- Why should anyone engage with people from outside their own background or community?
- What might prevent them engaging?
- What might they gain if they do engage?
- What might they lose if they engage?
- Why should they trust the "system"?

Process:

Effective engagement requires the involvement of people who share experiences of specific communities, either as "translators" or, preferably, as active participants in the work. Such

people should be identified, and their possible involvement facilitated. They will need appropriate training, support and encouragement.

Clarity about the purpose of any work is very important, both in design and communication. Any group which agrees to participate must be able to see how its contribution has affected the outcomes, and how its own agenda has been met.

The originating agency needs to be open and self-aware. All organisations have a culture which reflects and reinforces prejudices and values, which may positively or negatively affect the approach to certain groups in the community. Organisational prejudices and practices need to be evaluated and challenged where appropriate.

Innovative methods of working need to be sought. For example, consultations using questionnaires are inappropriate for certain communities where written communication is not the norm.

Project planning must take account of the time needed for effective engagement with involvement of different groups within the wider community.



PART TWO - Examples of how the voluntary and community sector can operate more inclusively

A Community Newsletter project

Background to the project

There is a lack of this community's capacity to do what is regarded as ordinary in many villages. Apart from a small group of 'professionals', few people have either the IT skills or organisational skills to produce and distribute a newsletter. Courses are being run locally but it takes a while for people to feel sufficiently confident.

Especially when on a time-limited project, sometimes you have to decide whether doing something for the community (rather than helping them to do it themselves as good CD requires) makes sense in the short-term. People actually seeing a newsletter was initially more important than who produced it.

What has happened

One of the issues raised in discussion with community members was the need for better communication in the village, specifically some sort of newsletter. There had been one previously which had ceased and the person producing it was unpopular. As we were unable to find anyone to take on the task, it was agreed to try again on the understanding that it would gradually be taken over by community members. As the parish comprises two villages, the newsletter would have to cover both; a circulation of approximately 1250 households. We decided it should be free and delivered to every house.

Community Development Worker's role

Three editions were produced, starting with two sides of A4, then a folded A3 version. Delivery was done by individuals known to me and a colleague resident in the village. A potential editor was then found; not a resident but a member of the church congregation with experience of producing technical publications in industry. It was suggested setting up a small editorial group which was rejected. It gradually became clear it was not going to work. Therefore a fourth edition was produced.

The newly appointed Community Association took over the production of the newsletter. An editor was found and the decision made to alter the format to a 'parish magazine'; The production of the magazine was covered by the Parish

Council, Parochial Church Council and the Diocesan Development Team. In spite of the editor giving birth to her second child and both children having chickenpox, the Christmas edition was produced and delivered by teams of residents organised by a co-ordinator (supported by me) in each village.

Outcomes

It seemed the system was now in place for the newsletter to continue to be produced & distributed on a regular basis. However, the editor (a freelance social worker) has been offered a new post & will be leaving the village in June 2005. To date, no-one feels able to take over, so the process begins again!

Awareness-raising about bogus callers for older people

Background to the project

This piece of work involved the production, distribution and promotion of an audiocassette tape for older people in isolated rural areas to raise awareness about bogus callers and how to avoid becoming the victim of a distraction burglary. This was intended to improve people's quality of life by instilling safety messages to those most at risk. We involved children and young people in the process to make the message more personal and fun (by having the message interspersed with Christmas carols).

The key aim was to make older people more aware of the problem of this type of crime in isolated rural settings, and equipping them with the knowledge to avoid becoming a victim. The tapes reached in excess of 3000 people and word of mouth through the children spread the message further.

What has happened

The project developed the creative skills of the children, in terms of music and artwork as well as raising their awareness of the issues through assemblies at school. By making a tape rather than a leaflet it reached people with literacy problems or visual impairments (common in the older age group). Promotion was done via local written and audio media and the launch event was held in an accessible venue with sherry on offer to encourage the attendance of those old enough to enjoy it!

Community Development Worker's role

The community development worker was the overall co-ordinator of the scheme. This included liaising with the school who recorded and edited the tape, the company who reproduced it and the narrator. She produced and delivered an education pack for the children so they could spread the word to those who would not receive a tape. She worked with Community Safety Partnerships and the Police to ensure the script was accurate and educational. She met with the distributing agencies individually to ensure everyone was up to speed with timescales and the message. She made the funding application to Awards for All, arranged extensive press coverage and organised the official launch event

Outcomes:

- Better informed older people who now feel safer in their communities
- Agencies and children have also become much more aware of the problem and the situation older people are in, which has helped to build relationships between the key stakeholders
- Children have had the chance to develop creative skills
- Press coverage via local newspapers and radio has delivered our message across a much wider geographical area and age group
- The launch event brought together communities of all ages in a social setting and gave the public an opportunity to add suggestions for next time
- The key outputs include the actual cassette which contains the message and carols, the Christmas card, designed to give sense of belonging to a community and a minimum of three thousand people hearing the message via the receipt of a tape.

Community Play project

Background to the project

A statistically deprived community of approximately 2,500 people on the 'urban fringe' of Stafford pulled together a steering group comprising members of the community to take forward an arts project using a national touring theatre company. The company performed their touring play and gave people the opportunity to talk about it afterwards. The company then returned to work with the community to write and produce a

play based on the village history, current issues and the future of the village. Other sub-groups then got involved in costume or set design, recording and editing plays, promotion and gathering evidence of the history. The play was then performed in the village before it went on tour. This case study relates to the organisation of the launch event (and support with bid writing) of the extended part of the scheme, which will take place over the next eighteen months.

What has happened

This project is in relatively early days and the group have not heard yet whether they have received their main grant from the arts council. For this reason the steering group has remained relatively small and includes only the 'usual suspects' and is not as inclusive as we hope it will become in the future. However once it has been confirmed that the money is available I hope the group will broaden to include more young people and other marginalised groups and individuals.

Community Development Worker's role

I attend all steering group meetings, share ideas and help with funding applications. As the group is not a registered charity and the area does not currently have a parish council, signposting them to the RCC's charities advisor and supporting their parish council campaign has been a spin-off. In the future I will lead the marketing and promotion group (this involves working with communities to design the promotional material and involve the local press). I have planted ideas and let the group take them forward, using craft material to encourage artistic design and helping children to get involved. I have been advising on bids and funding applications before submission. An evaluation of a much smaller production last year was used as the evidence of need for the larger programme this year. Because it has support from local people who attended last year, ticket sales for the launch are already going well and are adding to funds.

Outcomes:

- Greater community participation, cohesion and social activity
- Participation in the arts for normally marginalised and excluded individuals
- Pride in their village as they form the play and learn about their area
- Informal consultation and awareness raising about current issues.

Local consultation over the location of a skatepark

Background to the project

The need for a skatepark in the town had been established from young people's responses to earlier surveys. The local MTI Partnership recommended that the skatepark should be located on the Community Centre playing fields. There had been a history in the town of failure to recognise young people's needs, and of failed commitments to make. Many local adults see young people as disadvantaged and ill-served, but others see them as threatening, anti-social and abusive.

It had proved difficult to engage young people in the discussions leading up to the decision to proceed with the project. The Partnership believed it was important to engage young people in the planning and campaigning process. Work was carried out to set up the Craven Arms Skate Park Association, a group of local young people who took responsibility for planning the park and for setting rules for its use.

The proposal to build a skatepark on the playing fields at Craven Arms Community Centre was controversial. Two area consultations were carried out; both showed a narrow majority of local people in favour of the development. Following the final decision, some of the residents living in houses surrounding the playing fields launched an immediate and vigorous campaign against the proposal. There had been no detailed research into residents' feelings about the skatepark, and there was no information about which reasons for objections were most strongly felt and therefore no real basis for amending the plans to take account of legitimate local concerns. It was therefore decided to conduct a house-to-house survey to allow residents to express their views.

What has happened

An introductory letter was hand-delivered to local households, saying that houses in the area would be visited between 10.30 am and 6.00 pm on the following Monday. The letter gave the option to book a time within this period to talk to the researchers. All 70 households located immediately around the playing fields were visited, and residents were invited to give their views on the proposed development of a skatepark on the playing fields. Interviews were conducted using a semi-structured approach, which encouraged respondents to say whether they were for or against the proposed development and location, whether they had concerns about the development and

if so what they were. There was also an opportunity for questions of fact and record to be answered.

The potential difficulties included the very high levels of emotion among some members of the community about the proposals, and the possibility of physical violence being directed against the interviewers – there were anecdotes of previous threats of violence by one member of the local community.

Following the survey, the Partnership and Skate Park Association addressed issues of concern to the local community. A response was delivered to all households within the survey area, asking for any further issues to be raised. No further response was received.

Community Development Worker's role

This was a relatively straightforward piece of work, which involved some detailed planning for the initial letter, route planning, preparation of responses to likely questions and challenges, and a systematic approach to analysis of the responses. It was important to ensure that all views were fairly and accurately recorded and represented.

Outcomes:

- The picture painted by the objectors to the skatepark had been one of almost unanimous local opposition to the playing fields location. The survey showed a local balance of 30% opposed to the project and 70% either for it or not explicitly opposed to it
- The survey raised a number of issues about the proposal for the Partnership and Skate Park Association to address
- Some more general points were raised, concerning litter and rubbish, vandalism and anti-social behaviour and young people's needs
- The Town Council formally accepted the proposal to locate the skatepark on the playing fields
- The survey provided the local Playing Fields Association with factual arguments to back its own support for the project
- Some local objectors changed their view of the project
- The skatepark has been built on the proposed site and is in use!

PART THREE - tools and practical solutions

Introduction

A local community plan should enable all local people to agree what's good and bad about their community, what needs to change and how they would like to live together. When we are thinking about community planning, it's important to remember that there isn't just one "community". All of us who happen to live in the same geographical area belong to a variety of identities and groups, some of which stay with us for life while others may change over time.

Everyone should have the opportunity to be involved in consultation and to contribute their wide pool of experience, skills and knowledge. This is an important first step in building individual and community confidence and skills, developing a shared belief and trust in the process, and ensuring that future actions are wanted by the majority and not by just an influential few.

Some of the more traditional methods of consultation (questionnaires, meetings and interviews) tend to exclude the views of people who are unwilling or unable to take part. They often reach only those who are already articulate and confident, and miss out many who have an equally important contribution to make. They can produce rather predictable opinions and suggestions. What is needed is a way to involve those people who do not usually engage, and to do so some important aspects of working with all people should be considered well before any work is started:

- Effective consultation requires the involvement of people from all the different groups in the community. These groups should be identified, and their possible involvement sought. They will need appropriate training, support and encouragement
- Clarity about the purpose of any work is very important, in both design and communication. Any group which agrees to take part must be able to see how its contribution has affected the outcomes, and how its own needs have been met
- Innovative methods of working need to be found. For example, consultations using questionnaires are inappropriate for certain communities where written communication is not commonplace
- Project planning must allow time for the effective involvement of different groups within the wider community.

Before you start, think about.....

It is advisable to involve the following in your consultation process (where relevant)... Parish Council, District Council, County Council, landlords, shopkeepers, local religious leaders, local clubs and societies plus many others...

Groups who are often excluded from community consultation processes include:

- Schoolchildren
- Young people
- Retired people
- Those who commute to work
- People with Disabilities
- People experiencing mental health problems
- Those living in outlying areas
- Single parent families
- People from black and ethnic minorities, including Travelling communities

You may require some (or all!) of the following...

Access to a photocopier, Blu-tac, cameras, catering facilities, card (coloured and plain), chairs, clipboards, computer(s) (for collating consultation information), felt tips, flipcharts, paper, paperclips, pencils, pens, pins, post-it notes, sellotape, sticky dots, tables, tape recorder, Velcro pads, venues, waste disposal facilities..... plus many others.

A few other important things to remember...

- You really cannot over-publicise events: Put notices through people's doors, write information in the parish newsletter, get coverage from the local paper, have an advert or interview on local radio, put posters in shops, pubs, post offices, parish noticeboards. The more opportunities people are given to be aware of what is happening, the more likely they are to get involved
- Make as much effort as possible to involve all community members. This may mean visiting society lunches, getting the local pub involved or standing on the street for hours and talking to people
- Undertake a skills search. This may highlight people who are willing to help and have the skills to take actions forward
- Expect diversity; everyone's view counts and all suggestions are valid and relevant. There is no right or wrong – the emphasis must be on communicating to reach a compromise

- Be flexible. People may not want to come to an open day or drop in event; they may simply want to raise one or two points when given a flyer – think about ways to respond to this
- Make sure enough time and financial resources are allocated to make the consultation fully inclusive
- Involve other organisations and authorities. This may lead to more realistic actions.
- All methods can be made flexible and adaptable. Choose a variety of methods that will include the variety of people in your community
- The most important point is that **EVERY EFFORT SHOULD BE MADE TO CONSULT EVERYONE IN EVERY PART OF THE COMMUNITY!!**

Consultation methods

The following pages contain examples of different methods which can be used as part of a consultation process, together with an assessment of their advantages and disadvantages. There are, of course, other ways to consult people; the range is as wide as your imaginations....

Questionnaires

Questionnaires are the most commonly used part of the process of getting people's views. Questionnaires need careful planning and preparation if they are to yield useful results:

Briefly, the process is:

- Decide on target respondents. For example:
 - Households or individuals within households
 - Over a certain age
 - Businesses
- Delivery and collection:
 - Door to door delivery / collection - good return rate
 - Post - usually low response rate
 - Box in public places
- Offer incentives; for example vouchers from a local shop or tickets to village event(s)
- Questionnaires should have a short clear introduction explaining the aims of the consultation, and should give contact names and phone numbers of people who can give help to complete it.

Questionnaires are a very useful method of community consultation when carefully planned, designed, piloted and implemented. Questionnaires should enable respondents to forward their

individual suggestions and possible actions. When planning a questionnaire it is important that all questions included are relevant to the task and assist in achieving objectives. If consultation is occurring for an Action Plan it is advisable to ensure that community members have the freedom to express their individual views on a wide variety of issues.

It is possible to invite respondents to complete a questionnaire either on a face-to-face basis or in their own time, returning the completed document to a suitable location.

Questionnaire preparation:

- Consult widely with local people, organisations and relevant bodies to identify issues of local concern
- Select the range of questions
- Ask yourselves "Why are we asking this?" Why do you need to ask particular questions? Is the information available from another source? Will the question get the information you need
- Identify your target respondents. Look at separate questions for different groups, such as older people and young people.

Designing the questionnaire:

- Be as brief as possible. Limit the number of questions to a **maximum of sixty**.
- Questions should follow a logical sequence, be easy to answer and present a range of options
- Do not use jargon or technical terms
- Avoid personal questions which respondents may be unwilling to answer (e.g. financial)
- Avoid leading questions (those which assume or prompt a particular answer)
- Give adequate additional space for respondents to give their views.

Carry out a pilot run:

- Ask several people from different backgrounds to complete the draft questionnaire
- Revise the draft as necessary to take account of their feedback
- Produce publicity and circulate locally
- Prepare an attractive cover and an introductory letter for the questionnaire
- Have the questionnaire printed!

Carry out the survey:

- Use volunteers to deliver and collect the questionnaire, and to answer individual questions about it
- Use volunteers to staff phone helplines on completing the questionnaire
- Set up an efficient system to deal with the questionnaires as they come back
- Analyse the responses

How can questionnaires encourage greater inclusion?

- By ensuring that every member of a community receives a questionnaire, thereby giving an opportunity for everyone to take part in the consultation process
- By making sure that residents who may be unable to attend specific events have an opportunity to engage
- By ensuring that people who are unable to leave their homes are able to engage in the consultation
- By conducting questionnaires on a face-to-face basis, and explaining any queries
- By making sure that disabled people do not have to attend events in locations with unsuitable access or facilities
- By designing separate questionnaires for specific groups, for example young people
- By making sure that there is no intimidation from other community members and that everyone is able to engage fully
- By allowing people to respond in their own time and offer their considered opinions
- By ensuring that those who work evenings or weekends, which are traditionally the time when public events occur, are able to engage in consultation at their own convenience.

Disadvantages of questionnaires:

- Some questionnaire surveys can take a great deal of time, depending upon the number and complexity of questions and the size of a community
- As the length of a questionnaire increases, the number of respondents usually decreases
- People who are uncomfortable with reading or writing will probably not engage with the process
- If questionnaires are conducted face-to-face then interviewers need to be trained so that they are independent and the interviewer must not bully, guide or push the respondents
- There are important safety implications when face-to-face interviews are used
- People who are partially sighted or blind may only be able to engage with a questionnaire if it is conducted face-to-face
- It may be difficult to establish a best time to visit people in their homes; many people are not at home during the day and many people will be nervous of answering their door in the evening or after dark
- Poorly designed questionnaires can include leading questions which will not give an accurate reflection of participants' views



- The analysis of questionnaire data can be time-consuming and, if performed by an outside consultant, may be expensive
- They take a lot of organisational time and effort, and may therefore distract from thinking about other, sometimes more appropriate methods of consultation.

Chatting to people on the street

Advantages:

- It provides an opportunity to consult people who may not otherwise be consulted
- Community members in local paid work may be consulted during their lunch break
- If conducted during the evening or at weekends this may provide a means to engage with members of the community, such as young people, who often do not engage with formal groups.

Disadvantages:

- People are often unwilling to talk when accosted on the street; they may have little time to spare
- Any consultation would have to be time limited, therefore reducing the potential depth and detail of responses
- It can get very cold when standing outside for several hours, so the time of year at which the consultation is conducted should be considered
- There are important personal safety issues to consider if conducting consultation on the street in the evenings.

Suggestion boxes around the area

Suggestion boxes should be accompanied with:

- A brief outline of the primary objectives of the consultation
- And the potential outcomes, as well as
- Details as to how the boxes should be used.

Individuals may be asked to state:

- What they like and dislike about their community
- What they would like to see changed
- What actions they would like to see taken forward.

Suggestion boxes can be left in any locations regularly used by community members, including the local church, the local pub, local shops, the doctor's surgery, the vets.

Advantages:

- Suggestion boxes are quick and easy to use so can include people with little spare time and those who are concerned only about a few specific issues
- Suggestion boxes provide an opportunity for anonymous and unconstrained responses
- By placing suggestion boxes in locations where the majority of residents visit, provision is made to widen the scope of the consultation
- Those people who work evenings or weekends, which are traditionally the times when public events occur, are able to engage in consultation at their own convenience
- People who visit the community are able to forward their suggestions and comments
- If the boxes are placed in train stations and taken to bus stops then those who commute to work may be consulted
- The suggestion made will be appropriate and relevant to community members in their locality.

Disadvantages:

- Suggestion boxes may exclude those members of a community who do not read and/or write or for those for whom English is not their first language
- It will take time to collate the data, and the detail of the suggestions may be limited.

Drop-in events and 'open' meetings

The structure and content of such events can be varied to suit the participants and the aims. For example, an event might consist of a "drop-in" morning in a village hall or take place on a stall in a public

space, where people can simply talk to the organisers in an informal atmosphere. It might be set up as a series of specific meetings, with everyone welcome, where there are small facilitated discussion groups to enable people to have their say.

Advantages:

- Designed to be informal, people can commit as much time as they are able
- There are opportunities to make suggestions anonymously - use flip charts or sticky labels
- Community members often engage with one another around common issues in a relaxed atmosphere
- Such events allow those who might not normally speak up at a public meeting to have their say.

Disadvantages:

- Such events may lack the degree of formality some people require. However, it is entirely up to you how formal or informal your event is.

Community days

These can work in much the same way as drop in events, although they require more time to arrange and run.

Advantages:

- It is possible to invite local groups, clubs and societies to promote themselves and attract new members as well as organising activities for young children such as face painting, clowns and jugglers
- Such an event will promote interaction between individuals within a community and between community members and relevant authorities and organisations.

Disadvantages:

- Such an event needs careful organisation and co-ordination; participation may be limited without suitable planning and publicity
- It is important that the consultation remains the focus of such an event.



Popular local events: village fêtes and summer festivals

It is possible to consult a large number of people on one occasion by 'piggybacking' such events.

Advantages:

- By combining the consultation with social, seasonal and popular events, participation is likely to be increased
- It may provide an opportunity to provide more detailed and in-depth information about the consultation process
- A variety of activities and events may contribute to creating a more relaxed atmosphere.

Disadvantages:

- These events often occur in the spring or summer months and may therefore be less appropriate if consultation is being done at other times
- People may be more interested in other aspects of such events and may not participate in the consultation itself.

Focus groups and workshops

Focus groups are used in community planning as a semi-formal technique to:

- Assess people's needs and feelings about policies, plans, products and services
- Work towards consensus about resolving controversies and potential conflicts.

Focus groups bring together between six and nine people to discuss issues and concerns about the local area, community and facilities. A group typically lasts about two hours and is run by a facilitator who maintains the group's focus. The meeting can either be recorded or noted. Focus groups often bring out users' spontaneous reactions and ideas and let you observe some group dynamics.

Workshops can be used to focus on more specific aspects of a consultation process:

- When a theme has been identified from earlier responses, to enable a better-defined proposal to be agreed, or
- As part of the community planning process to explore possible solutions to issues or problems which have been identified during consultations.

Advantages:

- These events can provide focused, in depth discussion around specific issues and work towards detailed actions
- They can provide an opportunity to discuss potential conflict and reach

compromises in small groups as a means of identifying future actions.

Disadvantages:

- People may not be able to commit the amount of time required, so incentives may be needed – this all adds to the cost
- To be effective they need skilled design and facilitation– this can cost money
- They can only assess what participants *say* and not what they might actually feel or believe.

Door knocking

Door knocking can be an effective way to consult those who do not have the time or desire to attend meetings or other public events.

Advantages:

- People may often feel more relaxed discussing issues in their own homes
- Can ensure that all individuals in a community have been offered an opportunity to take part in the consultation
- It is possible to identify clusters of houses where individuals have not participated and then design ways to be more inclusive.

Disadvantages:

- Can use a lot of time and financial resources, depending on the number of houses within the community
- There are important safety issues involved both for the person visiting and the person being visited
- Many community members will be wary of strangers knocking at their doors
- The weather can act as a disincentive, especially during the winter.

Community lunches

Advantages:

- Providing refreshments can add a social element to proceedings while maintaining the focus on the consultation
- All members of the community are invited and many people meet new contacts with shared interests.

Disadvantages:

- Such an event may not appeal to the community as a whole
- The consultation process may be outweighed by the social element.

Writing to all local groups, clubs and societies who meet regularly asking them to identify issues

Advantages:

- Includes organisational and group views as an element in the consultation
- Enables specific interests to be expressed.

Disadvantages:

- Can provide a "double platform" for people with strongly-held views.

"Planning for real"[®]

"Planning for real" is a community consultation method involving the creation of a three-dimensional map of the area (often made by children in the local school) onto which everybody is able to place their ideas, suggestions, comments and actions for the future of their area. These are then discussed and prioritised and specific issues relating to funding and required levels of future community involvement are considered before reaching consensus on the priorities for the community as a whole.

Advantages:

- Young children can be empowered through the creation of the map and are able to put forward their own suggestions and wishes. Parents often attend the launch of the map to see the finished work and often feel able to put their own views forward
- For those people who may feel intimidated at open meetings, "planning for real" provides a means by which views can be put forward anonymously. The emphasis is placed upon the map so that person-to-person confrontation is avoided. All views are equally important
- The suggestion cards provide an opportunity for unconstrained responses
- The diagrammatic representation of suggestions and action on the picture cards provides a clear and easy means of involvement
- There are facilitators on-hand to assist anyone experiencing difficulties with the process
- The map is portable and can be taken to events and meetings arranged with local organisations, enabling members of the community who share specific interests to put their views forward.

Disadvantages:

- Successful planning for real events take a great deal of planning, time and publicity, which all costs money

- The event must be run at times which enable the working population of a community to take part
- The materials and facilitators required, add to the costs of the consultation process.

Suggestion or comment charts

Suggestion or comment charts involve a good supply of (usually flip-chart) paper, and can be used in much the same way as suggestion boxes. Post-it notes may be left for people to use or a pen can be attached to the chart. It is important that there are clear instructions on the purpose of the chart and how it should be used.

Such charts can be used at open days and drop in events for people to add further detailed comments or suggestions to existing proposals. Topics such as: "What do you like about your community?" "What do you dislike about your community?" "What actions would you like to see taken in the future in you community?" and "What can you do to help?" can also be covered by this method.

Advantages:

Suggestion or comment charts offer many of the same benefits as suggestion boxes.

- There is an opportunity to gain a better understanding of the issues affecting other community members, and to agree or disagree
- They provide an opportunity for unconstrained responses
- They can help to reduce the dominance of a few people that is often a feature of open meetings
- People who work evenings or weekends are able to take part
- People who visit the community are able to forward their suggestions and comments.

Disadvantages:

Again, the disadvantages are similar to those experienced with suggestion boxes, with the added disadvantage that suggestion or comment charts are not as anonymous as suggestion boxes.

Village/Parish Maps

This is similar to a 2D Planning for Real. A fabric map is produced of the village and people are invited to put on it things which represent the issues that affect their lives.

Materials:

- Piece of wood/strong cardboard
- Fabric
- Glue
- Re-positionable spray adhesive
- Paper/card
- Drawing materials (e.g. crayons/chalk)
- Alternatively ask people to bring photographs of important issues/places (taking groups out and using a disposable camera before hand can be made part of the activity) or take a digital camera and printer along to create the same outcome.

Method:

- Cut a piece of fabric in the shape of the area you are working/consulting in
- Put on or produce pictures of key facilities and mark on a few streets
- Stick it to the wood/cardboard
- Spray the fabric all-over with the re-positionable adhesive (you may wish to cover it to prevent bits sticking to it when it's not in use!)
- At the event ask people to draw something, which makes home, home (or use the mad, sad and glad issues technique)
- They put it onto the map where the issue or place is key.

Outcomes:

- A tangible map of the village
- People are able to communicate their views without attending a formal public meeting
- Encourages artistic activities
- A map, which can be used for future scooping exercises.

Lantern Making

People in the community produce lanterns and develop musical skills and march through their community. There are various outcomes including the potential for a social enterprise at the end of the project.

Materials:

- Trainer/artist
- Lantern kits (frame and candles)
- Transfers
- Glass pens/paints
- Musician
- Drums/instruments
- Permission to march if applicable.

Method:

- Use an artist to provide workshops in which the participants produce lanterns with pictures

- Use a musician to run workshops to spread musical skills
- Those who attended the workshops march through the village run a music workshop alongside the lantern making and have a band/drums procession leading the lantern carriers.

Outcomes:

- Lanterns which can be used to decorate the village in the future or even create a social enterprise
- Transferable skills developed among participants
- Marching and making things helps team building and community spirit
- Music creates intrigue and brings people out so they know what's been going on and can stimulate interest for future activities
- Fun!

Painting, drawing, photography and other arts methods; community exhibitions

Holding competitions and awarding prizes can attract the attention of people of all ages. Young people in particular may be provided with disposable cameras and offered awards for the pictures that best represent what they like and dislike about their community.

Alternatively, it is possible to widen the scope of this method and hold competitions for various age groups and include drawing, painting or other art forms. There is also the potential to develop a local exhibition to raise awareness of issues affecting the community.

Advantages:

- Awards may be presented at an open or drop-in consultation event, thereby encouraging young people to expand on the views expressed through their art
- Adults will have a keen interest in what their children have achieved and may become involved
- This method enables young people especially to contribute to the consultation process
- The inclusion of other age groups may encourage the involvement of people who do not take part in traditional consultations
- Consultation that involves art enables people to express their individual creativity while potentially developing new skills.

Disadvantages:

- Art materials, disposable cameras and the development of film are not cheap, and neither are competition prizes
- It can be hard to interpret what certain drawings, pictures and photographs mean. This may lead to mis-interpretation of individual views. Explanations may be required, and this may put people off and reduce participation levels
- Someone independent will have to judge the competition
- There may have to be a number of prizes, or rewards for taking part.

Story Telling

Asking the community to create stories about their lives is designed first and foremost to be fun but also to tease out issues that affect local people without formality or prejudice.

Materials:

- Puppet making materials (e.g. empty bottles, scrap fabric, beads and glue/tape)
- Same materials for props
- Ribbon
- An idea for a story.

Method:

- Ask each person to create a puppet of any type (e.g. a person, animal, robot)
- Split those present into groups of 4/5 and give them a 'time line ribbon' for the play structure to be based upon
- Ask them to make up a simple play featuring all the characters they have made, remembering the story writing rules:
 - It starts somewhere
 - It takes a journey and has motion (e.g. up the hill, down the hill, down the hill, up the hill)
 - Everything is repeated three times, there are 3 or more characters – think of the pigs or the bears!
 - It can have a twist before the end.
- Ask them to create the props they need
- Practice the play running it along the ribbon
- Perform the play(s) to the other group(s).

Outcomes:

- Telling a story is fun and engages young people as well adults
- People can discuss the issues which affect them without the need for a formal meeting
- The theme of the chosen story may be an issue that directly affects the members of the group or it can be purely fictional
- Fun!

Example story:

There is a farmer in *village name* who goes out to his field to dig up a potato for his dinner, he lifts his fork to break the soil and the potato shouts "STOPPPPP, you've ignored me up to now when I needed nurturing to grow but only when you want something from me do you pay me any attention". The farmer rubs his eyes in disbelief and says, "potatoes can't talk". "Yes they can", says the dog. The farmer rubs his eyes again and says, "dogs can talk" so he goes to see his friend the postmaster. Up the hill, down the hill, down the hill, up the hill and round the corner to the post office and tells the postmaster the story. "Objects can't talk", says the post master "yes they can", says the stamp. The farmer and the post-master rub their eyes in disbelief. They go up the hill, down the hill, down the hill, up the hill and round the corner to the parish council office and tell the parish councillor the story. "Objects can't talk", says the parish councillor; "yes they can", says the hammer. The farmer, the post-master and the parish councillor rub their eyes in disbelief and say, "let's go to the Queen to see what she thinks". The farmer and the post-master and the parish councillor go up the hill, down the hill, down the hill, up the hill and round the corner to the palace and tell the queen the story. "Don't be so silly, what on earth do farmers, post masters or parish councillors know? Objects can't talk, keep quiet if you don't understand what you're talking about" and she sends them home. After they have left, the queen mutters to herself "objects can't talk". "Yes they can", says the Throne. THE END.

Community Jigsaws

By using drawing and other artistic skills people are able to produce a picture of the issues that affect their community. The images produced on jigsaw shaped pieces are put together to represent everyone's views of the area.

Materials:

- Large wall hanging fabric with jigsaw pieces drawn on it
- Paper in the shape of pieces drawn on the wall hanging
- Paints/chalks/crayons/photographs/magazines
- Fabric & paints/glitters/glues
- Polaroid/digital camera and printer.

Method:

- Produce a large wall hanging with jigsaw pieces drawn on it and hang somewhere central (or use an event already happening to get passing trade) so people can drop in

- Ask people to draw or create an image which relates to the consultation issue and represents their views
- Photograph the person (with necessary permission)
- Stick picture and photo on the jigsaw.

Outcomes:

- Community spirit increased
- Engages people in consultation
- Metaphorically joins people in their community using the principle of a jigsaw (cohesion)
- Issues which affect those participating are collated without the need for written questionnaires or a formal public meeting.

Grants Days

A full day for community groups to come together and bid for funds in an innovative way. At the end of the day successful projects receive a cheque so they can begin work immediately.

Materials:

- A hall with tables and chairs for different groups to sit at
- Stationery, e.g. pens, flip charts, acetates/laptops (if available)
- A facilitator with knowledge of funding and community development
- A presentation and panel area
- Presentation equipment
- Refreshments for the whole day (i.e. tea, coffee, lunch and dinner)
- Funders cheque book (with a limit set on the maximum grant which can be applied for and a maximum amount available in total, i.e. if you have 6 groups invited to bid for up to £2000 have £12 000 available!)

Method:

- Invite groups looking to carry out small scale projects
- Provide a facilitator for each group
- The facilitator helps the group work up an idea into a bid and presentation
- At the end of the afternoon the group present their idea to the panel
- The panel consider it immediately and give an answer after all the presentations are completed
- A cheque is provided to the group so that the project can begin once funds have cleared
- Feedback and evaluation happens in the usual way.

Outcomes:

- If a project is worthwhile and the facilitator does their job properly the bid will be successful and a new project can be started

- Confidence is built with direct support
- Providing tea and coffee keeps people happy, lunch sustains them and celebratory evening drinks or a meal go down well!

Quizzes

Quizzes – especially pub quizzes - are a very popular activity in many rural areas. It is possible to design a quiz that retains all of the enjoyment and entertainment of the traditional quiz while incorporating a consultation exercise.

Each round is designed around broad themes such as transport, entertainment, sport and environment; all topics that are relevant to most rural areas. The questions within each round cover all manner of historical, current and topical issues. At the end of each round, sheets are passed around to provide an opportunity for people to put forward their suggestions and actions for their locality. It may be an idea to ask participants to put their age, sex and whether or not they are a local resident next to each suggestion.

Refreshments can be provided throughout the event and at the end of the quiz the team with the most correct answers is awarded a prize. It is possible to use quizzes in locations such as village halls and other community buildings.

Advantages:

- Pub quizzes provide a means to consult young adults over 18, for whom there are often very few social activities in a community, village or parish
- Pub quizzes (subject to licensing conditions) are suitable for people of all ages
- Quizzes can be used in a variety of locations
- Quizzes provide an entertaining means to gather community members together.

Disadvantages:

- Such an event would require lengthy organisation and planning
- Not all people use the local pub and not all people leave their homes after dark
- As the evening progresses, the suggestions may become more extravagant.

'Walkabouts'

The 'walkabout' involves community members walking through their local area and recording all positive and negative features of interest. It is possible to do this individually or in groups. The local school may take an entire class on such an exercise.



Ian Russell, Turnastone, Herefordshire

Advantages:

- This exercise may increase local knowledge and encourage people to take part in local schemes
- Particularly for young people, this method may be stimulating and enjoyable
- It can be carried out by an entire family
- It can help newer residents gain a better understanding of the locality and interact with other community members
- It provides an opportunity for people to gain a better understanding of issues of local importance
- Walking through an area will enable people to consider more place-specific suggestions and future actions.

Disadvantages:

- For those who are disabled, such a method may be unfeasible
- It takes a great deal of organisation and co-ordination, which all takes time.

Scoring and Ranking

Scoring and ranking enables the prioritisation of community members' choices for action.. Participants are asked to select their choice or choices from a group of options. This selection can be done by placing a tick or a sticky dot in the box(es) next to choice(s).

Advantages:

- Simple, quick and easy to engage with
- The charts used can be portable
- Highlights different individuals' different preferences over various issues – people

gain an insight into the priorities of other community members.

Disadvantages:

- There is a limit to the number of potential options, therefore people do not have the scope to suggest alternatives
- Certain literacy skills are needed.

Semi-structured interviews

Semi-structured interviews provide an opportunity to investigate in greater depth the views of community members. The interviewer should ensure that the topics covered are those that are relevant to the objectives of the consultation. The interviewer will begin by establishing a rapport with the interviewee and follow by asking a series of broad questions on a range of topics. It is important that the interviewee feels they are able to say as much or as little as they wish. All the information is recorded by the interviewer, either by hand or using a tape recorder. The transcripts form an important part of the consultation data.

Advantages:

- The interviewer records responses so reading and writing skills are not needed
- This method can be conducted in individual homes or in small groups in a suitable location, which has the potential to engage outlying residents
- People are able to speak their mind
- Those members of the community who have poor literacy skills, or may be blind or partially sighted, are able to engage with the process

- The boundaries for responses are very flexible; people are able to make suggestions relevant to their specific views
- For those members of a community unable to attend specific events the consultation process becomes more flexible
- Community members are able to decide how much time they have to engage and respond accordingly
- Semi-structure interviews provide an opportunity for open discussion based on a number of agreed questions in preference to a formal questionnaire.

Disadvantages:

- Conducting interviews and writing transcripts can take a great deal of time
- People may only be willing to express their views to someone independent
- It may be possible to group responses incorrectly.

Where Should Consultation Meetings Be Held?

It is important to consider carefully where consultation meetings are held, to ensure that everyone is given a chance to participate. Among the possible locations are...

Existing community clubs and societies....

Advantages:

- A group of people with shared interests are collected together and there may be opportunities to gather people's detailed opinions
- It may be possible to visit (among others) village lunches, Women's Institute meetings, Weight Watchers, training practice for the local sports teams.

Disadvantages:

- People may feel intruded upon; they attend these groups for a specific purpose. To overcome this try to not to dominate proceedings, and make the consultation methods relaxed and informal.

Schools...

Advantages:

- By working in partnership with local schools it is possible to obtain the views of a large number of young people in your community
- It creates an opportunity to develop closer links with local schools, and children welcome the opportunity to have their say (9 times out of 10) – especially

when they see their suggestions taken forward.

Disadvantages:

- Children may feel limited in what they can say because they are at school; they may hold back their true feelings
- Schools will not provide a venue to consult young people who do not engage with formal education
- School timetables are often set well in advance so a great deal of prior notice and organisation will be required.

Pubs, churches, shops, post office...

Advantages:

- Most people in a community visit these focal locations at some point during a week
- It offers an opportunity to consult community members who may not be able to attend a meeting at a set time.

Disadvantages:

- People visit these locations for specific purposes and may only have a short amount of time to spare (if any at all). Therefore, it is vital that the methods chosen are simple, approachable and do not encroach too much on people's time
- The depth and detail of consultation responses may also be limited.

For further (more in-depth) information try some of the following:

Organisations:

- Action With Communities In Rural England: www.acre.org.uk
- Community Education Development Centre: www.cedc.org.uk
- Combined European Bureau for Social Development: www.cebsd.org
- Community Development Foundation www.cdf.org.uk
- Community Matters: www.communitymatters.org.uk
- Council for Ethnic Minority Voluntary Organisations: www.emf-cemvo.co.uk
- Federation of Community Work Training Groups: www.communitydevelopmentlearning.org.uk
- International Association for Community Development: www.iacdglobal.org
- Lifelong Learning Network: www.life-learning.net
- New Economics Foundation: www.neweconomics.org
- Neighbourhood Initiatives Foundation: www.nifonline.org.uk

- Neighbourhood Renewal Unit: www.neighbourhood.dtlr.gov.uk
- Women Connect: www.womenconnect.org.uk

Publications:

- Chambers, R. 2002 *Participatory Workshops: a sourcebook of 21 sets of ideas and activities*, Earthscan, London
- Countryside Agency, 2000 *Not seen, not heard? Social Exclusion in rural areas*, Countryside Agency, Cheltenham
- Henderson, P & Thomas, D. 2000 *Skills in Neighbourhood Work*, 3rd Edition, Routledge, London New Economics Foundation / Participation Network, 1998 *Participation Works: 21 Techniques for community participation in the 21st Century*, www.neweconomics.org
- Wates, N *The Community Planning Handbook*, Earthscan, London.

Possible Exercises to Involve People

"Find Someone Who..." (Human Bingo)

This is a useful warm-up exercise for use with groups who may not know each other well. It's fun and non-threatening, and can be used to get people to identify common interests.

Everyone is handed a sheet, and asked to circulate. The idea is that people talk to as many others as possible in (say) fifteen minutes and writes the name of a different person against each of the questions on the sheet. You can offer a prize for the first person to complete their sheet.

Example sheet:

Find someone who....

- Dislikes the amount of traffic passing through the village





Rose Canham, Bomere Heath Primary School

- Thinks that young people have enough to do in the village
- Is over seventy years old
- Is under sixteen years old
- Has done something like this before
- Likes the Village Hall
- Belongs to a local group or organisation
- Knows more than twenty people in the Parish other than members of their family
- Thinks that its better living here than it was twenty years ago
- Uses the local pub / shop etc
- Can name three members of the Parish Council
- Thinks there should be more local affordable housing etc etc.

Wordstorming (also known as “Brainstorming”):

This technique is used to work with groups to identify shared issues, ideas or / and experiences. It needs someone to facilitate, a flipchart and pens, and a group of (preferably) more than six people.

Participants are asked to shout out words which reflect their thoughts or feelings about a particular theme or subject; for example “things I like about the village” or “things I dislike about the village”.

The process needs to be kept moving rapidly, without time for people to think too deeply. The facilitator records the group’s contributions on a flipchart, initially without any comments. Discussion between group members needs to be

stopped at this stage as the idea is to get a range of quick-fire responses.

When the group slows down, the facilitator stops the process and takes the topics raised for deeper group discussion. This can include “What does this mean?” or “Why was this raised?” or “How important do you all think this is?”. The aims of this part of the process can include (among others):

- To gain consensus about the priorities attached to the issues raised
- To agree which issues go forward for further discussion, research or analysis
- To identify shared concerns or likes about particular issues
- To identify shared experiences, prejudices or attitudes.

“Stand up if . . .”

This exercise can also be used to identify shared ideas , beliefs and issues across groups, and to break down disengagement and shyness.

The group is asked to sit on chairs in an inward-facing circle. The facilitator stands in the middle and asks members of the group to “stand up if. . .”; and reads out a series of statements. If members of the group identify with the statement they stand up, and then sit down again before the next statement is read out. An example of a statement might be “Stand up if you visited the village pub last night”, or “Stand up if you use the supermarket in town”.

Sample statements: “Stand up if . . .”

- You like living here
- You keep to speed limits
- You’ve lived here all your life
- You’d like a local post office
- You have children under five
- You want to buy a house
- You feel you belong here
- You’d use a local bus service
- You are over fifty
- You belong to a local group
- You know your neighbour
- You want a better village hall
- Houses are too expensive here.

“In an Ideal World”

This exercise is designed to get participants to focus on changes needed in communities; whether in the physical environment, in the relationships, or in the way it’s run. It starts with a group’s views of what’s wrong, and then moves the group towards a plan for improvements.

- Participants work in small groups (4 – 5 people) and wordstorm things which are wrong with the parish or village
- Everyone comes together to share the results of their wordstorms. These are written on a flip chart
- The whole group agrees three or four issues which they would like to work on either all together or in small groups.
- For each example, participants are asked to agree:

- In an ideal world, what would be the long-term solution?
 - What could be done about it within the parish/ town?
 - What practical steps can be taken towards this:
 - Tomorrow
 - Within the next six months
 - Within the next year
- e) Together share responses and action plans for each issue. Agree a shared action plan.

“One step forward, one step back”....

This game is designed to enable a group to identify individual and community effects of discrimination and social exclusion. Participants are each given a description of a character, and asked to imagine themselves in that rôle. Examples are:

- You are a fifty year old woman who is visually impaired and a wheelchair user. You do not have paid work, and claiming Disability Living Allowance. You are looking for some voluntary work in the market town where you live
- You are a middle aged white woman who lives with her husband in a beautiful village close to the county town. You are a senior social worker who doesn't have children. You have recently been successful in a promotion interview to become manager of the local Youth Offending Team
- You are a 35 year old male Asian solicitor. Initially after qualifying you found it difficult to get a job, but about six years ago you were offered a job in a practice in a small rural town. You have just been offered a partnership.

Participants all stand in a line across the middle of the room or area. The facilitator then reads out a series of statements. The participants respond to these as follows:

- Step forward if the statement would have a positive impact on their character
- Step back if the statement would have a negative impact on their character
- Stay where they are if the statement wouldn't affect their character, or they're not sure what the effect would be.

The statements are designed to draw out the different effects of laws, conventions, rules, or events on different people. For example:

- Your choice of friends and companions is seen as your own business
- You find that people and organisations accept that you have valuable skills and experiences

- You are likely to receive non-judgmental treatment from health, educational and social care services
- You find it straightforward to study and to access information if you so wish
- You can expect a relatively secure financial future
- You are easily able to assert your rights when dealing with statutory and social agencies
- You find it straightforward to obtain a job in an organisation which works with children
- You are likely to be believed if questioned by the police.

When all the statements have been read, participants identify who their character is, and describe why they are standing where they are and how it feels.

'Stand by Your Beliefs'

This group exercise is intended to demonstrate the importance of belief, prejudice and conditioning. The facilitator explains that there is an imaginary line dissecting the room. At one end is the statement “STRONGLY AGREE”; at the other end is the statement “STRONGLY DISAGREE”.

Participants stand in a loose group in the middle of the room. The facilitator then reads out a statement, and participants place themselves on either side of the “line” according to what they think and feel about it. The facilitator asks participants to tell the group why they are standing where they are. Participants are allowed to change their position as they hear different contributions.

Example statements are:

- Men are naturally stronger than women
- Emotion clouds judgement
- Political correctness” is counter-productive; it puts people's backs up
- All censorship should be abolished
- Successful women have to be more competent than successful men
- Housework should attract a wage
- There should be no legal minimum age of sexual consent for anybody
- Everyone has the right to defend their way of life.

At the end of the exercise, the whole group feeds back on:

- How the exercise felt
- What were their perceptions of the process involved
- What they learned about prejudice, attitudes, values.

Acknowledgements

We would like to record our gratitude for use in this Guide of material from the following:

- The Community Consultation Checklist Copyright (c) Bob Dick 1995-2003. This document may be copied if it is not included in documents sold at a profit, and this and the following notice are included. This document can be cited as follows: Dick, B. (1997) Community consultation checklist. Available at: <http://www.scu.edu.au/schools/gcm/ar/ar/p/comcon.html>
- Action in Rural Sussex for inclusion of parts of “Consultation Techniques; Strengthening Social Inclusion and Individual Empowerment” by Ieuan Sherwood
- The Community Council of Devon for inclusion of parts of their guidance in “Where Should Consultation Meetings be Held?”

'Stand by Your Beliefs'

This group exercise is intended to demonstrate the importance of belief, prejudice and conditioning. The facilitator explains that there is an imaginary line bisecting the room. At one end is the statement "STRONGLY AGREE"; at the other end is the statement "STRONGLY DISAGREE".

Participants stand in a loose group in the middle of the room. The facilitator then reads out a statement, and participants place themselves on either side of the "line" according to what they think and feel about it. The facilitator asks participants to tell the group why they are standing where they are. Participants are allowed to change their position as they hear different contributions.

Example statements are:

- Men are naturally stronger than women
- Emotion clouds judgement
- Political correctness" is counter-productive; it puts people's backs up
- All censorship should be abolished
- Successful women have to be more competent than successful men
- Housework should attract a wage
- There should be no legal minimum age of sexual consent for anybody
- Everyone has the right to defend their way of life

At the end of the exercise, the whole group feeds back on:

- How the exercise felt
- What were their perceptions of the process involved
- What they learned about prejudice, attitudes, values.

Acknowledgements

We would like to record our gratitude for use in this Guide of material from the following:

The Community Consultation Checklist Copyright (c) Bob Dick 1995-2003. This document may be copied if it is not included in documents sold at a profit, and this and the following notice are included. This document can be cited as follows: Dick, B. (1997) Community consultation checklist. Available at: <http://www.scu.edu.au/schools/gcm/ar/arp/comcon.html>

Action in Rural Sussex for inclusion of parts of "Consultation Techniques; Strengthening Social Inclusion and Individual Empowerment" by Ieuan Sherwood

The Community Council of Devon for inclusion of parts of their guidance in "Where Should Consultation Meetings be Held?:"

The West Midlands Rural Community Council Network draws together the four rural community councils (RCCs) which operate within the region. Each member RCC is an independent charitable organisation with a broad range of member organisations including parish councils, voluntary and community organisations and village halls, and has access through newsletters and mailings to over four thousand groups and individuals throughout the region. The RCCs have the common aims of promoting voluntary action and improving rural life. Across the West Midlands the RCCs have a combined turnover of over £3.75 million and employ about one hundred full time equivalent staff providing technical and professional support on issues and projects to people in local communities.

RCCs

have a considerable understanding of rural issues born out of a long involvement with rural communities.

They provide a forum for voluntary and community organisations and a wide range of information and advisory services. They enjoy membership of many partnerships that encourage community development and capacity building in rural areas and that manage projects delivering benefits to rural communities.

Part of the RCCs' effectiveness stems from the close relationships they have with networks including village hall committees, playing fields trusts and parish councils. Recently they have also developed relationships with regional structures, most notably through the West Midlands Regional Rural Affairs Forum, the West Midlands Rural Network, RAWM (Regional Action West Midlands - the voluntary and community sector network) and the West Midlands European Network.



West Midlands RCC Network Contacts:

Community Council of Shropshire

5 Claremont Buildings,
Claremont Bank,
Shrewbury, SY1 1RJ
Tel 01743 360641
Fax 01743 233335
enquiries@shropshire-rcc.org.uk
www.shropshire-rcc.org.uk



Community Council of Staffordshire

Friars Mill,
Friars Terrace,
Stafford, ST17 4DX
Tel 01785 242525
Fax 01785 242176
info@staffs.org.uk



Community First in Herefordshire and Worcestershire

141 Church Street,
Malvern, WR14 2AN
Tel 01684 573334
Fax 01684 573388
info@communityhw.org.uk
www.communityhw.org.uk



(These contact details also apply for Michelle O'Neill, West Midlands RCC Network Co-ordinator.
[Email: michelleo@communityhw.org.uk](mailto:Michelleo@communityhw.org.uk))

Warwickshire Rural Community Council

25 Stoneleigh, Deer Park
Stareton,
Kenilworth, CV8 2LY
Tel 02476 531280
Fax 02476 531296
www.ruralwarwickshire.org.uk



Authors: Jonathan Hyams
Community Council of Shropshire

With thanks to all those individuals and organisations who contributed to the production of this paper, in particular Angela Dowling, Sarah Jessop and Jean Sunter

Papers available:

Rural Housing
Rural Transport
Voluntary Sector Infrastructure
West Midlands Rural Affairs Forum
The changing face of support for Rural Communities
Village Halls at the Heart of the Community
Modernising Rural Delivery

Supported by:

