

Working with Possibility

Appreciative Inquiry in the North West

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For more information about the work of NWTWC visit:

www.nwtwc.org.uk

From April 2011 the empowerment work developed by NWTWC is being taken forward by *Our Life*, a social enterprise based in the north west:

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Foreword

AI is an excellent method of agencies and communities working together to achieve jointly desired ends. It is built on and enables good leadership, builds on the voice of local people and generates enthusiasm and a 'can do' approach thereby increasing opportunities.

NWTWC has been promoting the approach and this booklet disseminates work which has evolved with NWTWC support.

Whole system Ai involves the community and the voluntary sector. The final phase focuses on sustainability. All the case studies involved the community and voluntary sector and have an element which focuses on sustainability.

The booklet comprises of an introductory essay by Clíodhna Mulhern, six case studies from all around the North West and a list of resources, including books, DVD's and on the web.

Unleashing the Potential in Knowsley was one of four inquiries about frontline workers; others took place in Pendle, Lancaster and Copeland. A working group was established to look at the work from the NWIEP, GONW, the LIA, NWTWC, and 3 Local Authority Ai practitioners. This broad based approach helped steer the project in its early days and contributed to the overwhelming success of the initiative.

We recommend the methodology to you and hope that new and experienced practitioners in appreciative practice will find this booklet a source of inspiration and guidance.

Helena Kettleborough

Director NNW and NWTWC

March 2011

Introductory essay: what is Appreciative Inquiry and why does it matter? Clíodhna Mulhern, Local Improvement Advisor

Our world today is full of change – locally the challenge of big society and public expenditure cuts, globally the challenges of climate change, economic meltdown and the migration of peoples at levels we have never seen before. This is a world that calls for leadership from all of us – and successful leaders will be those who look for possibility in the midst of this turmoil, who understand how to nurture relationships between diverse stakeholders, who embrace new ideas and welcome new voices and who know how to facilitate a clear, shared vision of a different way of doing things...locally, nationally, globally.

How refreshing (and different) it would be if this vision were shaped by an in-depth understanding of what works well already in our organisations and in our local communities – an understanding of what we must nurture and sustain to provide the conditions for a healthy-functioning, resilient community at ease with itself? How inspiring it would be if all of this was worked out by the communities and the agencies that serve them, creating together in the same room together, a picture of the world they want to create and then together, again in the same room, designing the changes that would make it a reality. If these ideas make sense to you – then welcome to the art and practice of strength based, solution focussed large group conversations.

Since the mid 80s meaningful methods for holding large group conversations which are sometimes called dialogues have blossomed. By now tried and tested – they are used all over the world by government, business, communities and civil society – commonly involving all sectors together – multi-stakeholder conversations. Books have been written about them, organisations have been set up to promote their use and they form essential components on university degree courses in the business and social science fields. In the midst of this rich field of conversational practice sits Appreciative Inquiry.

‘there is no more powerful way to initiate significant change than to convene a conversation’ Margaret Wheatley: Turning to One Another

Appreciative Inquiry is a mindset – a world view that holds that in every situation, community, organisation, situation, no matter how dismal it may feel – something works. What matters is how to grow more of what already works. Furthermore, it is the very inquiry itself – the purposeful quest to discover what works, to learn from it and to apply that learning to a promising future – that energises, motivates and inspires us. We simply do not spend enough

time thinking about things that work well, we don't understand why they work well so we cannot apply that wisdom to our future plans. Appreciative Inquiry changes all that...

Appreciative Inquiry is founded on powerful, underlying assumptions:

- In every situation something works...find it and let it flourish.
- What we focus on becomes our reality...if we focus on possibilities we find possibilities – if we focus on problems we find problems.
- There are always multiple realities – different ways of seeing.
- The way we ask questions either creates or denies possibilities. So be mindful in how we do this.
- The language we use creates our reality. So pay heed to what we say and how we say it...
- When we carry forward to the future some of our old ways – then they should be the very best of our old ways
- Value differences – diversity nourishes creativity and resilience – seek it out and welcome it.

Working with these assumptions is like looking at the issue from the other end of the telescope. It feels a little uncomfortable at first but soon our eyes adjust and we see things differently...more importantly we see new possibilities. And because Appreciative Inquiry touches the whole person – it engages hearts and minds – we somehow have more energy, commitment and passion for bringing about the changes we have co-evolved through our Appreciative Inquiry.

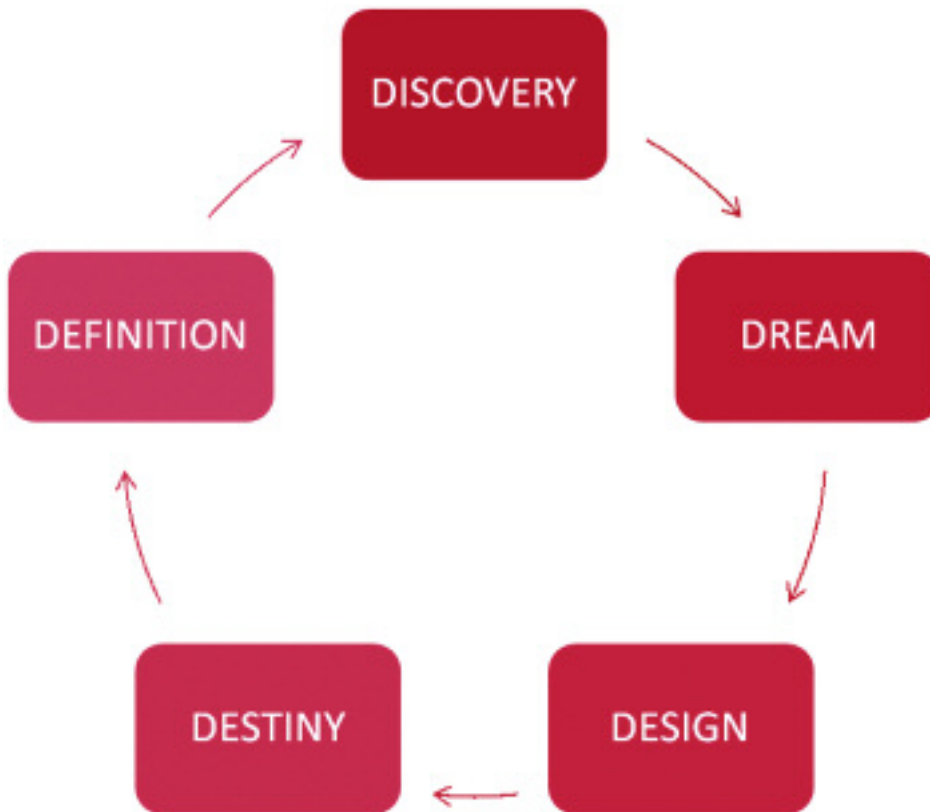
“Nothing great was ever achieved without enthusiasm”

Ralph Waldo Emerson

I say co-evolve because Appreciative Inquiry is most often used as part of a large group or whole system conversation. By bringing into the conversation everyone affected by the topic, which is known as the whole system, potential for breakthrough thinking is increased exponentially – the more diverse the stakeholder group the more innovative the thinking. More importantly, the likelihood of implementing the bright ideas that emerge through the conversation is hugely enhanced.

'If you want to go faster, go alone; if you want to go further, go together'
African Proverb

Appreciative Inquiry is akin to co-operative inquiry and action research. We start by defining the issue – the most important stage, often the most challenging and as we know from the underlying assumptions, fateful. Then follows the discovery – where we do our research – we mine the group's experience for all their different positive experience (stories) of the issue – for what works. Now we are at the heart of the inquiry where we determinedly explore all the stories for the learning – to understand fully the essence of success. Why do things work well? What are the conditions that lead to success? Only when we have crystallised this are we ready to move to the future. We do this first with an expansive and inspirational picture of a future where our issue is fully resolved and then with a focused and grounded conversation around making this vision a reality using the endeavours and reources of the very people in the conversation. Finally we explore how to sustain success in the long term and for everyone affected by the issue again across the whole system.



In a nutshell this is the Appreciative Inquiry cycle and all of the case studies you are about to read have travelled this path – some on complex inquiries that lasted months, with several events and other components, and hundreds of participants to simpler inquiries that were planned in one meeting and resulted in conversations that lasted just one day.

Conventional thinking Vs Appreciative thinking:	
Focus on problems, deficits and needs	Focus on strengths, assets and solutions
Stakeholders, especially residents are subjects	Stakeholders are participants
External consultant as expert; uses their tools, extracts the data, analyses it and makes recommendations to senior people who make decisions about and for others	External consultant as facilitator: enables participants to inquire and create the future they want together
Review is followed by implementation	Inquiry and implementation are part of the same process and can be simultaneous
Ownership and relationships mediated through hierarchy which can be authoritarian	Fosters ownership and relationships strengthening resilience in the system
Can be dis-empowering	Empowering
Searches for 'objective truth'	Underpinned by a belief that there is no-one truth, what you see depends on where you are looking from and on your mindset.
Often concerned with 'numerical' measurement of impact at the expense of understanding qualitative impacts.	Focussed on a deep understanding of qualitative impacts eg learning from human stories
Judges, often leading to blame	Reflects, usually leading to learning

Across the North West region, councils, PCT's and other public agencies and voluntary organisations have been exploring the power of appreciative inquiry – Salford, Trafford, Lancaster, Knowsley, Rochdale, Manchester, Cumbria – have all pioneered a range of appreciative approaches to strategic planning, to service redesign, to neighbourhood renewal and to problem solving. The Strategic Health Authority is developing a Joint Strategic Asset Framework building on these approaches. St Helen's Community Engagement Network Public has embedded appreciative practices in all they do. We are building a powerhouse of expertise in the region and which we can use to create strong, resilient and positive communities, able to address the challenges facing them.

Lower Falinge Reinvents Itself



Introduction

With a burning desire to breath life back into their neighbourhood, 250 residents from the Lower Falinge Estate in Rochdale met together with 170 public service workers in a round of linked community conversations.

Housing officers, police, community workers, health service managers, councillors, employment advisors, teachers, refugee workers, planners, environmental service managers joined in the conversation to discover what really mattered to them and then worked out how to make things better.

Background

Lower Falinge stood out on all national indicators as an estate with “problems.” Featured on an episode of Secret Millionaire it had got itself a bad name. Residents felt demonised and public servants felt demoralised. Research by the University of Salford quantified the size and shape of the “problem” – it seemed insurmountable.

How we got started

A few visionary local authority officers were determined to view Lower Falinge as a bundle of potential rather than a bundle of problems – and convinced their LSP Board to try Appreciative Inquiry. So they got together with the police, the NHS, Job Centre Plus and housing managers to agree a new collaborative approach to working along side local residents to create a new Lower Falinge.

“Whole system” conversations

Soon a series of linked conversations was underway – each focussing on exploring everyone’s very best experience of a good neighbourhood and learning from that. Together they surfaced the best and the brightest ideas. Senior managers, councillors, residents, front line staff and project managers all joined in – everyone spoke to new people, heard new ideas, saw things differently and forged new relationships.

Ideas Flow

Conversations were lively, funny, moving, creative and often chaotic– they ranged widely over issues like housing, safety, neighbourliness, work and health – they unearthed stories that inspired and educated. Some conversations were expansive, stimulating dreams and aspirations – others sharply focussed on practicalities. Different conversations served different purposes – but all were intent upon igniting the potential of residents, public service workers and their organisations. From the midst of the various conversations emerged a collective vision for a new Lower Falinge – and public service workers and residents together, set to work...

Our Learning

- Leadership, leadership and leadership – the neighbourhood officers had the vision and the courage to go for a “messy”, “unmanageable” conversation process involving everyone – to create a new beginning.
- LSP Executive Board supported an innovative approach even when they could not be sure of result.
- Keep everyone in the loop – the neighbourhood officers spent considerable time keeping everyone informed and involved at every stage

Outcomes

Between January 2009 and early 2011, highlights include: –

- RBH investing £100K in giving Lower Falinge ‘Priority Area’ status leading to a team of three additional support staff to work with individuals, groups and provide activities and support/signposting. This has led to 75 ‘Work Assessments’ or personalised plans for local residents, 8 new groups established and developing well and referral routes to other agencies for individuals.
- A ‘One shop’ hosting both the Police (including the Community Beat Manager and 2 PCSOs) and the RBH Priority Area Team drop in.
- The local police presence has resulted in overall crime reported (Sept 08–Sept 09) down by 42% and Anti-Social Behaviour down 29% during the same period.
- More than ten services now providing outreach sessions which were not there previously including Employment Links, Connexions, Youth Service, Health Trainer etc.
- Front Line Staff Group (with regular cross team training) and using the strength based approach for its meetings. Great connections made and referrals amongst staff significantly increased.
- 12 residents recruited to NHS HMR volunteering, and over 50 residents gaining a range of qualifications including 1st Aid, Food Safety, ICT, ESOL
- Improved ‘Natural Play Area’ with additional private sector sponsorship (£50K in total)
- Front Line Staff and residents gained Level 2 ‘Working in Neighbourhoods’ qualification. Recently, Community Champions Training and front line training in ‘solution-focus’, mental wellbeing and literacy support training.

Twelve months on, a second round of resident interviews has taken place in Lower Falinge to gauge the progress made. A staggering 317 were completed (61% of households) including 87 of the original interviewees from Summer 2008. Issues were flagged up through the In Focus process included the poor sense of belonging, poor access to services, wellbeing and safety along with the original issues of work, skills and health. Some highlights relating specifically to these areas (whilst using the Borough's Place Survey for a measure of comparison) are:

- Lower Falinge residents have a much stronger sense of influencing decisions affecting their area (NI 4) than the Borough [35.7% compared to 25.6%]
- 64.7% of Lower Falinge residents felt people from different backgrounds get on well together (NI 1), compared to 57.2% for the Borough – particularly pleasing given the very diverse nature of the estate.
- 3/4 (74.7%) of Lower Falinge residents felt local services treated them with respect all or most of the time (NI 140) compared to 60% Borough wide.
- 41.1% of residents felt that there had been an increase in the range of services for Lower Falinge whilst just 12% thought not. 1/5th of residents had used a new service within the last 12 months.
- The local police presence may have influenced the results that people in Lower Falinge feel safer both during the day, and also after dark, than the Place Survey results for the Borough (83.2% compared to 78.9% during the day, and 47.5% compared to 34.7% after dark).
- Noise and people being drunk/rowdy were worse than the borough average, although some can be put down to the nature of the estate (flats), whereas teenagers hanging around, rubbish/litter, vandalism and people dealing/using drugs were all better in Lower Falinge than the borough, which were all issues raised in the original findings.

In relation to the 87 residents interviewed for both surveys,

- An increase from 37.9% to 46.5% of those residents gaining formal qualifications
- 59.8% now compared to just 41.9% in 2008 feel they possess particular skills.
- The number of people negative about the estate have halved from 36.7% to 18.3% now.

The strength based approach has been used to support the Manchester City Region's 'Better Life Chances' pilot in Kirkholt, and the success of the Falinge Front Liners and the connections made are now being replicated in Kirkholt and Langley.

Overall, more people in Lower Falinge feel safe in their neighbourhood than do people in Rochdale generally. People are taking control of their own lives and their community: participation in job training, sports, arts and volunteering has increased. New community groups have popped up. The Air is full of possibility...

Want to know more...

Video case study, see www.nwtwc.org.uk/champions/features/index.php?pid=10

Written case study see www.nwtwc.org.uk/uploads/documents/awardcasestudies.pdf



Unleashing Potential in Knowsley

Introduction

Knowsley MBC has long had a track record as an innovative council. This is the story of how they used the Connecting Communities Programme to explore new ways of working with residents and front-line workers, how they listened and learned (again and again) from this experience and how it changed how they see the community in Page Moss, what they think and do there.

Background

The neighbourhood of Page Moss had been identified as a priority area for the Connecting Communities Programme – so by implication it was in need of relationship building within the community and with public service agencies serving the community, in need of community leadership and access to services.

How they got started

Connecting Communities encouraged localities to explore innovative approaches to old “problems. The Neighbourhood Services Division embraced the moment and Knowsley Council threw itself into exploring a mix of ‘new’ approaches.

- Research into the motivations and values of the communities in Page Moss, carried out using The Campaign Company’s method, Cognitive Edge. New insights into the values and ways of the community followed on. Old notions and preconceptions were dumped and a genuine hunger to find out more by talking with the community was freed up.
- Meanwhile, on a NWTWC Learning Exchange seminar, key Council staff had discovered the transformational power of Appreciative Inquiry (Ai). They promptly organised Ai training for community champions from Page Moss, with similar training for staff from across the Council. Very quickly, people from all services and from the Page Moss community were speaking the same language for the first time – the language of community (and workers’) strengths, possibilities and potential.

- So Council managers, front line workers and residents got together – as a planning group – to plan a new way of talking with one another.



Whole System Conversations

A series of big conversations followed – to co-design a community plan; and to explore the potential of front line workers (Unleashing the Potential of Front Line Workers, June 2010). All these conversations started from the premise that there were strengths in the community and strengths in front line working that just needed to be recognised, valued and then put to work to make for a happier more resilient community and more effective service delivery.

Councillors, strategic level managers, team leaders, front line workers, residents, Council, Police, NHS and voluntary organisations all joined in. Grounds' maintenance staff worked with the police; residents worked with strategic managers; councillors worked with youth workers – everyone worked with everyone. The new insights from The Campaign Company's research created new perspectives.

New Ideas Emerge

The work carried out during these big conversations turned into a community action plan and an initiative to transform front line working. Knowsley Council has changed its approach to working with families; front line workers are devising ways to improve service delivery, reduce transaction costs, increase self-responsibility and reconfigure services. Residents are getting active with more volunteering, an openness to taking responsibility for their own patch and a welcome for police and other services who had previously experienced hostility from Page Moss.

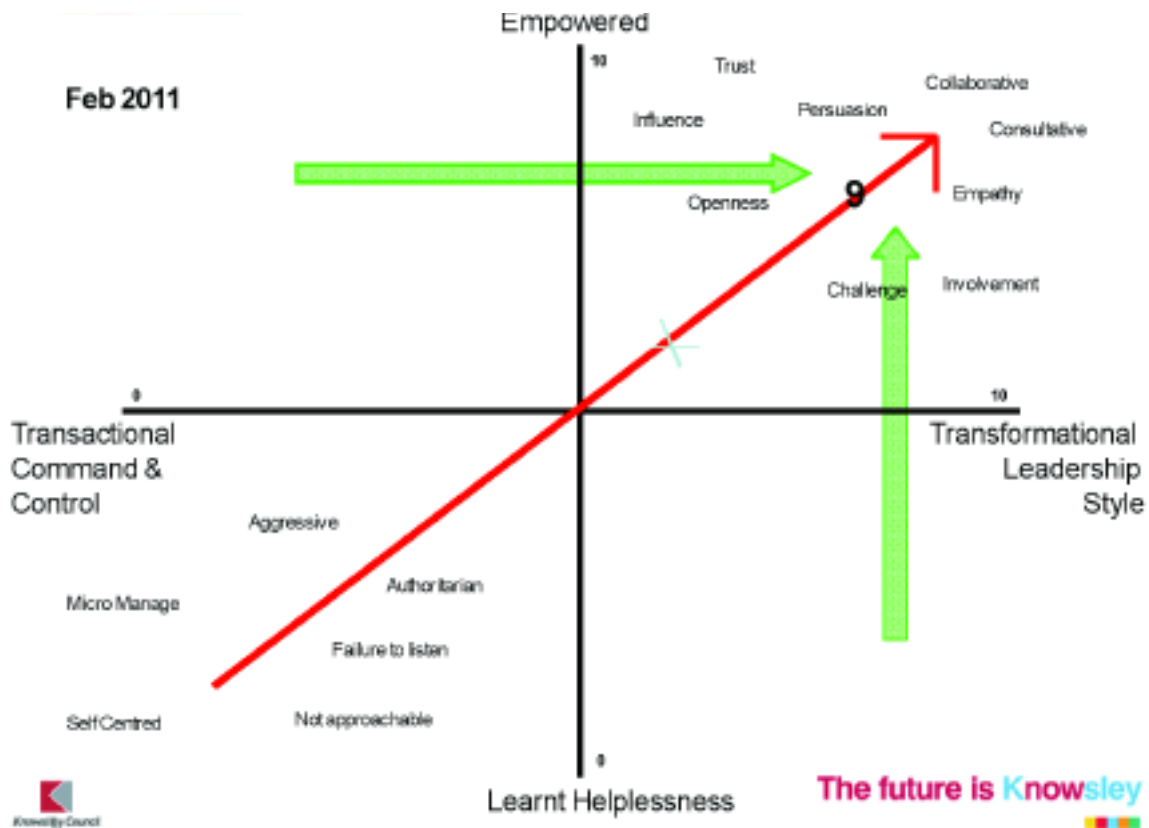
Our Learning

- Encourage leadership and innovation at all levels in the “system”
- Invite residents into genuine and open conversations about what matters.
- Strategic managers need to be in the middle of it – working alongside front line workers, residents, councillors and managers – “together we are a genius”

Outcomes

The inquiry set out to obtain a deeper understanding of the work of frontline staff in delivering exceptional customer service and how we could capture and build on the very best of what works. This inquiry demonstrated that organisations need to trust in people’s capabilities to be bigger than their job, to act on behalf of the organisation as a whole for the better of the communities they serve.”

The Ai work is ongoing and impacts on all conversations. An appreciative approach is used at weekly meetings and small inquiries are held routinely. It is helping change mindsets and creates high levels of positive energy. Work with a group of street cleansing and grounds



maintenance staff achieved a shift in culture, previously they were frustrated and de-motivated; they now feel empowered and trusted to do a great job. This is indicated in the diagram below, change in management culture is moving up the red line. The street cleansing and grounds maintenance staff ranked the style 2 at the beginning of the process and 9, eight months later:

The control that staff now feel they have to work well is improving the reputation of the Council and its workforce. Decisions to go over and above the daily work schedules fill the team with pride and satisfaction in the work that they carry out, and get better results. The management team want to nurture this approach.

“The rewards of having residents, members, strategic / operational managers and frontline workers in the same room are well worth the price. What we saw was that people’s sense of isolation and disenfranchisement dramatically decreases and their views and judgements of each other started to disappear or at least decrease in nature and their ability to think about the good of the whole started to increase.”
Area Relationship Director, Knowsley MBC

Want to know more . . .

Big Conversation ‘Unleashing the potential of frontline staff’

[www.councillors.knowsley.gov.uk/Published/C00000139/M00004953/\\$ADocPackPublic.pdf](http://www.councillors.knowsley.gov.uk/Published/C00000139/M00004953/$ADocPackPublic.pdf) p 43-56

Unleashing the Potential of Frontline Workers: Appreciative Inquiry DVD to be available at www.nwtwc.org.uk



Beginning a positive journey together in South Ribble

'One of the most positive pieces of work that I have been involved in. .and in the poorest area of the borough. (Councillor - South Ribble Council - March 2010)

Introduction

This was an overview and scrutiny initiative to address health equity. We adopted a broad approach to health equity focussing on the importance of participation, empowerment and addressing social determinants. Community events held in July 2009 and February 2010 were part of it.

The inquiry involved the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, Community Engagement Team, residents an emerging Community Association, Councillors, the local Housing Association, Police, Health workers and voluntary organisations

Background

South Ribble, in Lancashire, is mostly rural villages and small towns where the population is relatively affluent and white. Broadfield is in Leyland, the main town and is in the 20% most deprived in England on the Index of Multiple Deprivation.

Where we started

The scrutiny committee identified two connected sets of Aims; to work with Broadfield residents alongside partners who work in the area and to pilot Appreciative Inquiry and learn from its application.

Seventeen officers were trained in AI and started making connections.

A planning group came together they called their inquiry: You Matter in Broadfield. Residents



did not feel they mattered and the Aim of the inquiry was to change that

Conversations

The planning team collected stories. Soon they discovered that among the many things that residents appreciate about Broadfield (their assets) are the green spaces, people, community spirit and a community that invests in its young people. The glass was already half full.

Two events using arts were held to share the stories of success and develop a shared dream. Participants wanted to use the assets they had discovered to encourage more community spirit, to ensure their abundance and that activities, facilities and services will be joined up

In response, agencies decided to work in partnership with greater understanding of what is already going on in Broadfield. Scrutiny and the Council adopted a greater focus on working on successes, involving the community, using AI.

Learning

A valuable new way for people from all parts of the system to communicate with one another, between groups and organisations and across them. Several officers and councillors adopt this in diverse situations.

A good way of finding out what is going on, working for people and existing potential in the community; relationships and service development start to build from this knowledge base and in collaboration with all other parts of the system

Officers and councillors discovered that starting with peoples' stories produces better outcomes than going to people with their agenda.

Outcomes

Key players are continuing to raise the profile, share and build on learning of the approach, for which 2 DVDs produced as part of the inquiry, are a helpful resource

- A stronger, more active community association with keener support from local agencies
- Better understanding by officers of what already existed in Broadfield including community potential
- Councillors embracing new ways of leading communities; the overview and scrutiny committee made this the subject of the following review
- The approach is integrated into the Corporate plan
- A new way of working for scrutiny and officers for example:

The council approached market traders in a different way; asking them what they wanted 'and achieved outstanding positive reaction' (Senior Officer - South Ribble Council - March 2010).

Market traders are now working with the council on a market development plan.

Since the inquiry new notice boards facilitate information dissemination, a new youth group has been set up, a Giant Veggie Patch opened and is flourishing and funding for a community base and part-time worker is being sought. S. Ribble District Council built into their new neighbourhood teams ongoing structures for communication with residents and partners.

Want to know more...

A longer report available at www.nwtwc.org.uk/uploads/South_Ribble_case_study.pdf

Two DVD's,

- Broadfield Matters which focuses on the events that took place in July 2009
- Broadfield Matters Appreciative Inquiry focuses on the final event and includes interviews with key stakeholders on the impact of the inquiry.

Copies of both DVDs are available from the Community Engagement Team, South Ribble Borough Council, Civic Centre, West Paddock, Leyland, Lancs. PR25 1DH Tel: 01772 625304 email: community@southribble.gov.uk



Winning ways in Walkden, Salford

Introduction

How important are life time non-smokers? How does an asset approach change the way you think? What do you do differently?

50 people came together to look at smoking in a local area from an appreciative perspective. They included Overview and Scrutiny members, councillors, local residents, frontline workers, young people, people from the local authority, NHS, social enterprises, voluntary organisations, regional and local smoking specialists, delivery managers, strategic managers and the chairperson of Primary Care Trust. It became clear that if you ask appreciative questions, tobacco control is a success story. In the UK, adult non-smoking rates have increased from 48% in 1948 to 79% in 2008.

Background

Salford Overview and Scrutiny Health Wellbeing and Social Care Committee (OSC) wanted to make a difference of the gap between illness and death rates between their privileged and underprivileged populations. The impact of smoking is marked in this area and is more common in Walkden than the average in Salford, let alone the UK. Nevertheless, as in most areas, the majority of residents are now non smokers.

How we started out

The overview and scrutiny committee (OSC) developed an appetite for Ai when undertaking some training in work to address health equity.

The Local Government Improvement and Development (formerly IDeA) offered support as part of an initiative exploring asset based approaches to improve health equity.

The OSC decided to focus on smoking in the Walkden area and worked alongside people who lived and worked in Walkden to plan the inquiry. The team included smokers and non-smokers aged 16 to 80!



.The team discovered from national statistics that the proportion of people who do not smoke has more to do with the number who never started than the number who have given up. As a result, the team decide the task is to paint a visible and positive picture of the lives of lifelong non smokers.

The team asked lifelong non-smokers who lived in Walkden for their stories. We discover that people who have never become regular smokers identified as non-smokers before they were 20. A picture of the strength of people who have never smoked emerged. There were young people whose decision not to smoke reflected a desire to shape their lives differently from smoking peers or family members.

In September 2010, a lively event engaged 50 people. Together they teased out the winning ways from the stories before agreeing a shared vision for Walkden and finally a series of actions which learned from the winning ways and would help them make their vision a reality. During the course of the day aspects of the vision started to happen, for example, young people increasingly influenced the proceedings. Actions grew from the stories, for example telling the truth about the tobacco industry. Previous concerns that councillors and senior officers would be uncomfortable with the informal, participative activities proved unfounded.

In January the OSC made recommendations shaped by the inquiry

Learning

By looking at smoking from a solution focussed perspective we can see just how successful tobacco campaigns have been and the central (if invisible) role that life time non smokers contribute to this success.

An OSC can energise officers, politicians and residents, young and old when working alongside stakeholders on an issue.

Lifelong non-smokers may have developed brilliant strategies which account for their success. Tobacco control agencies may increase their success by working with the group who embody their vision

Outcomes

The inquiry stimulated people to get involved in Walkden and Salford. The approach was also well received by regional and national tobacco control agencies and other areas have expressed an interest in learning from their residents who succeed in never smoking. It has also created an appetite for new ways for doing OSC reviews - ways that generate motivation and commitment by all stakeholders to play their part in transformation. Salford Public Health are planning to use the learning from the inquiry to inform their future tobacco control work including their social marketing.

Commitments at the end of the day

I feel very committed as I have a young family and want to make a difference to them (community)

I will talk to my colleagues and visit St Georges School with STAMP members to talk to young people. I will also contact leisure services about more partnership work (Salford smoking specialist)

My focus and vision is to make smoking history for children and young people. I will talk to . . . about how Smokefree NW can do more to support. (Smokefree NW Officer)

'I want to make a difference for me and my generation and younger people. I want to act on the issue now and start spreading the message asap, I will make a DVD (school student)

Want to know more...

See <http://tobaccocontrol.wikispaces.com/Winning+Ways>

Winning Ways in Walkden DVD will be available on www.idea.gov.uk

The report of the Health, Wellbeing and Social Care Scrutiny, Appreciative Inquiry – health inequalities, smoking will be available on www.salford.gov.uk



Barlow Moor: Learning and action through valuation



Introduction

This case study shows how an appreciative mindset can be used in a range of ways, in this case valuation, the focus of appreciative evaluation being on valuing. It was part of a broader evaluation of S. Manchester Healthy Living Network (HLN) which took place in 2008.

The valuation focussed on work with older people at Barlow Moor Community Centre, a thriving community association.

Background

The centre is in South Manchester, surrounded by social housing but near affluent areas, one of its super output areas has levels of income deprivation amongst older people that is within the highest 10% in the country.

How they got started

The Partnership Health Worker at S. Manchester Healthy Living Network wanted an evaluation framework she could use to emerge from the evaluation. The external evaluator asked her to work with her to develop it

Barlow Moor Community Association agreed to take part in a valuation of work with older people. They were interested because they are under pressure to develop an older peoples' forum.

The evaluation team agreed to work together. The team worked as equal partners. It included Barlow Moor Community Association workers, their older people project evaluator, a Healthy Living Network worker and evaluator.

The conversations

5 key stakeholders and 21 users took part in appreciative conversations using a co-designed and piloted aide memoire and questionnaire.

Conversations confirmed that the area was a good place to grow old; users had aspirations; better shops and an accessible surgery and needed only the self belief to make it happen

'I recently lost my husband so I have needed to come out and see people. I have good neighbours so it's a good area to be in – I wouldn't swap' (centre user).

'The retirement flats are a good place to live, but lack of nearby shops is a problem as it means you need a car. I am concerned about the post office closing and the charity shop closing which means losing a point of social contact' (centre user).

Feeding back the conversations proved to be motivational,

'I could not believe the energy. People were standing up with excitement. They were astounded that we had listened. They had to take on board that they had done it. They were not used to voicing opinions and being listened to.'
(Partnership Health Worker, S. Manchester Healthy Living Network)

The conversations involved the Partnership Health Worker and external evaluator from the project, S. Manchester Healthy Living Network Project staff, volunteer management committee member, external evaluator and older users, the PCT Engagement Officer and Local authority Ward co-ordinator

New ideas emerge

The conversations enabled the worker to be more responsive.

Putting 'a woman concerned about losing her sight in touch with appropriate organisations. The lady was not going to come back again but has come today' (worker).

Barlow Moor Community Association staff learned how to make their activities more accessible; more people joined in. It was clear that an older people's forum was a turn off but a Cake and Conversation group might serve the same purpose and be valued.

Our learning

Involving people – the process must enable them to see they have been listened to and that their contribution is important *'no good just giving them a report'*

People may need support and self-confidence to make the changes they want to happen

Co-operation and generosity flourish when people understand what is going on and can influence important decisions

Outcomes

The valuation began transformation of the work with older people which is now led by users based on:

- A new level of trust between workers and users. As users increasingly shape and create the provision they want, a more co-operative ethos between individual users and different users groups has emerged.
- Users' confidence that they can influence local services. They have seen change that they felt previously unable to influence, most notably the GP surgery moving to ground floor accessible accommodation
- Establishment of a flourishing Cake and Conversation group
- The questionnaire developed has continued to be used by staff at the project with newcomers because it *'acts as a tool to have a conversation. It brought the barriers down because it is 1:1. People are able to put their guard down, it opened doors'*

The HLN staff member got what she wanted; an evaluation framework which she has used successfully elsewhere

Want to know more...

Section 6.0, pages 20–25 of South Manchester Healthy Living Network: Learning for the Future, www.judithemanuel.co.uk/docs/Learning-for-the-Future.pdf

Healthier Brinnington

Introduction

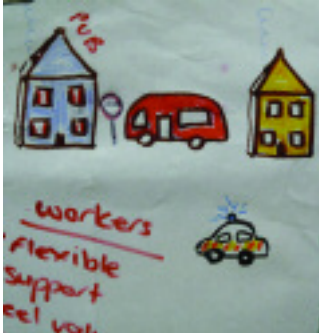
AI was initially used as part of an overview and scrutiny review in 2005-6. One outcome of the event was the development of a joint PCT and local authority health inequalities strategy where appreciative inquiry was the chosen method for developing health equity action plans.



Context

Figures had revealed a ten-year gap in life expectancy between two areas of Stockport, Brinnington and Bramhall. Both the Council Overview and Scrutiny Committee and NHS Primary care Trust had independently wanted to do some innovative work to address health equity more effectively. They joined forces to do an Appreciative Inquiry in Brinnington.

How we got started



The initial stage involved outreach activities and vigorous recruiting and of all key stakeholders; residents, workers and decision makers

The inquiry consisted of 2 half day events plus events in schools, the youth service and with asylum seekers.

The school pupils participated by producing collages based on the inquiry questions which they then discussed.

100 stakeholders attended two 3-hour public events where they explored what is working in Brinnington; this was followed by a visioning day and looking at ways of making it happen.

A joint health inequalities strategy was developed as a result of the inquiry. Action plans for were developed through mini inquiries in four more areas of the borough

Our learning

Cascading AI

When Stockport decided to use AI as the method for consultation in the health inequalities strategy, this indicated serious recognition. However there were advantages and disadvantages in the transition from 'exciting new idea' to 'mainstream' method. Some staff resisted having AI imposed. Others found it difficult to adapt to a solution focussed approach.

i Getting people with authority in the room

The initial Overview and Scrutiny Committee AI was a high profile one-off event offering an interesting new method. It was harder to get decision-makers to attend a series of smaller, local events. While it is possible to get workers to attend events, and to get senior management support, it is harder to get 'buy in' from staff groups not from lead agencies. Workers often lacked the flexibility to develop the actions identified by community participants. This illustrates the importance of whole system Ai and getting people from all levels involved. The four mini-inquiries identified the need for organisational change so that managers participate or give their staff authority to commit to action on issues that emerge. If senior people are not involved it is harder to take these things forward.

ii Using the information

In the first inquiry we struggled to know what to do with all the data, having produced mountains of wonderful stories.

We have improved our ability as synthesisers of information in order that this can be acted on. For example, we identified 2 main themes from the recent locality inquiries for the health inequalities strategy:

- Local services employing local workers
- Providing information in understandable language and formats

These inform service commissioning overall, while a variety of local actions were taken more immediately.

iii Language and topic

It was interesting in itself that the decision to use the method did not transform the topic from 'health inequality' to the more positive 'health equity'. Locality workers were put under pressure to run the inquiries within short time periods giving little time for development work.

The topic of the inquiry is crucially important and needs to be decided by a range of stakeholders, a step which is easy to forget. Inquiry topics should be:

- Positive and
- Specific enough to get useful information.

Working under the heading of 'health inequalities' meant it was challenging to identify a more specific topic area. Workers tended to opt for broad inquiries which led to very broad and diverse information.

iv. Making the design phase meaningful

We struggled to make the design phase meaningful. In order to make this less abstract and theoretical we asked people to think of the likely objections that would be raised to turning their 'dream' into reality. This helped to anticipate the likely challenges and then 'design them out'.

Outcomes

i. Engaging everyone together

I felt listened to. . it will lead to something

The beauty of having all the stakeholders in the room is that conversations create actions:

I wanted to set up a fruit and vegetable stall ... someone from Healthy Living Network could help with initial funding and resources ... I set up a stall which sold affordable fruit and vegetables

'A healthy walking group was meeting in the area. The AI enabled participants to link with neighbours involved in other community based activities ... on food and environment with children, staff and parents at a local school ... a Treasure Hunt involving 120 people developing local knowledge about pathways and natural history ... everyone won on that day' (Community Development Worker)

The inquiry brought different groups in the community together: young people were delighted to be involved in consultation which was not just about young people's needs. An asylum seeker who had had to cope with the loss of 10 relatives and cancer reported that she:

'Linked with others through AI, got involved in courses and is on her feet again'



6 months later, local people reported continuing enhanced community feeling and activity in the area. A local 'no smoking was stronger; mothers were talking about planting flowers in the spring; young people wrote a fruit and vegetable rap and a local agency organised a fun-run.



The AI also had an impact on agencies. An Extended Schools Officer reported that it had helped 'understanding of need (and) actively informed decisions made. The area **had** benefited as a result of needs identified at the AI. New provision included a Mums-in-Art project; extra parenting courses; new locations for antenatal care.

An Executive Councillor for Public Health was 'impressed by the energy release ... a feel of what was going on in the community ... bring them together ... develop new ways of working ... AI was a good way to start.'

The Associate *Director of Public Health* felt the inquiry resulted in 'AI (being) embedded in health scrutiny ... rolled out in the health inequalities strategy'

The Brinnington inquiry illustrated how AI can be used to provide evidence of engagement through documentation of the process and results. Participants could see their input translated into action on the ground which leads to real satisfaction. It generated positive perceptions in the area.

The inquiry contributed to service redesign and improvement, to 'place-shaping' and public engagement. The energy and positivity were not restricted to community members but permeated through workers as well.

The AI offered workers an energising, positive method for community engagement. Time and resources for the preparation of the inquiry in order to get the right people in the room and ensure the topic is appropriate were crucial. Synthesis of the data to distil out key information for decision-makers is important. Providing support to workers in the use of AI will enhance results.

The success of Brinnington encouraged further use of appreciative practice around the region and more appreciative practice training.

Want to know more...

For the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, report, see <http://www.cfps.org.uk/scrutiny-exchange/library/health-and-social-care/?id=1249>

Emanuel J and Hill E (2008) Helping to turn dreams into reality, New Start, 5th December 2008, pps 20-21 <http://www.judithemanuel.co.uk/docs/DreamsIntoRealityp1.pdf> and <http://www.judithemanuel.co.uk/docs/DreamsIntoRealityp2.pdf>

Resources and Networks

To get you going:

Appreciative Inquiry Handbook by David Cooperrider, Diana Whitney and Jackie Stavros (Berrett-Koehler Publishers 2008).

The Thin Book of Appreciative Inquiry by Sue Annis Hammond (Thin Book 1998).

Appreciative Inquiry for Change Management using Appreciative Inquiry to facilitate Organisational Development by Sarah Lewis, Jonathan Passmore and Stefan Cantore. (Kogan Page 2008)

The World Café-shaping your future through conversations that matter by Juanita Brown and David Isaacs (Berrett-Koehler Publishers 2005)

Open Space – A Users Guide by Harrison Owen (Berrett-Koehler Publishers 1997)

Interesting recent UK Experience

Ai Practitioner : Working Boldly with AI : Examples from the UK Ai Network, February 2009 <http://www.Aipractitioner.com/>

A glass half full: how an asset approach can improve community health and wellbeing (*IDeA 2010*) <http://www.idea.gov.uk/idk/Aio/18410498>

Websites, Networks and communities of practice

Appreciative Inquiry Commons – <http://appreciativeinquiry.case.edu>

Developing a joint strategic asset assessment

<http://www.communities.idea.gov.uk/comm/landing-home.do?id=3924714>

International Journal of Appreciative Inquiry – <http://www.Aipractitioner.com/>

UK Appreciative Inquiry Network – <http://www.networkplace.eu/web/page.aspx?refid=52>

The web-site includes details of events, including training

A Northern Network has met in Manchester twice a year since April 2010, for more information contact, suzanne@appreciatingpeople.co.uk

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For enquiries about the work of NWTWC,
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