

north west
together **we** can

routes to **empowerment**

Sharing good practice

routes to empowerment

Sharing good practice

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About this publication

Since its launch in 2006, *North West Together We Can* has supported a huge range of activity designed to help people in scores of organisations learn together about how communities can have more say over the decisions that affect them and the services they receive.

Our role is to help develop collaborative learning, practice and research about community empowerment and engagement across the North West. We co-ordinate activities among a range of partner organisations, share learning, develop knowledge, and explore the best ways to fill gaps.

A lot of that work has been behind the scenes and out of the spotlight. But it has made a real difference to the way local authorities, voluntary organisations and others think about communities and work with them. In inspiring, innovative and interactive ways, this work has been blazing a trail – developing new routes to empowerment.

To show the extent of what we have been doing and to share some of the learning that has emerged from it, this publication brings together summaries of 12 different aspects of our work. Each aims to show some key aspects of what has been achieved and learned.

This is not intended as a comprehensive publication – it would take a weighty tome to reflect every aspect of the work we have supported – but as a series of signposts for those who are interested in exploring further. Each section contains details of sources of further information, and we encourage readers to make use of these.

More information on all North West Together We Can activities is available from:

Eve Davidson,
Programme Manager,
North West Together We Can
First House, 367 Brinnington Road
Brinnington, Stockport, SK5 8ED
Telephone 0161 474 4544
Email eve.davidson@nwtwc.org.uk
Visit www.nwtwc.org.uk

PART I: inspiration

1 North West Citizenship and Take Part Network

The North West Citizenship and Take Part Network promotes and develops learning for active citizenship. In 2007/08, it delivered five courses in 'active learning for active citizenship'. Over 150 people took part in the courses, delivered in conjunction with four partner organisations.

The network also ran two courses entitled Training the trainers – community learning for social change. These 20-hour courses equipped participants to deliver community-based workshops and training that will enable more local people to become active citizens, influencing and creating change in their communities. Two examples of the network's activities were a regional seminar for deafblind people, their carers and service providers; and a School of Participation delivered at Wilson Carlile House, a hostel for homeless men. Both were delivered by Community Pride, a Salford-based organisation specialising in community empowerment and learning.

Seminar for deafblind people, their carers and service providers

More than 40 people attended this seminar, which was a first attempt to bring deafblind people together in the North West to discuss their needs.

Seventeen of the participants were deafblind people, and issues of communication were prominent from the start. The venue had a hearing loop, which some participants used, but they found this difficult because of background noise. Others used British Sign Language (BSL), hands-on BSL – a form of signing in which a deafblind person places his or her hands over the

hands of the signer to follow the signing movements – and the Deafblind Manual Alphabet. Organisers found it extremely difficult to get interpreters with the necessary specialist skills.

The seminar was based around group discussions. For the first part, participants examined the challenges facing deafblind people in their daily lives. These include isolation, lack of independence and poor access to information. In general, deafblind people appear to rely heavily on family, friends and volunteers, and lack knowledge about care packages, direct payments and benefits available to support independent living. In any case, provision is patchy and inconsistent.

Information for deafblind people is not provided in appropriate formats and people often miss vital appointments when they cannot read letters or use the phone. Many deafblind people have health problems such as depression and anxiety but find it difficult to access medical services.

Several participants commented on the urgent need for awareness training, as few people seem to understand the complexity of deafblind issues. There were many calls for resources to be targeted specifically to people with dual sensory loss.

During the second part of the seminar, participants discussed priorities for deafblind people and service providers.

These included the following:

- Deafblind people want to be independent but often find themselves reliant on others. They have a right to relevant information about the choices and packages available to them.
- More consistency is needed in the provision of care packages and personal assistants.
- More specialist interpreters are required.
- Deafblind people are generally overlooked as potential employees, and by public transport providers.
- Access to information, public buildings and leisure services is poor.

- Funding for services is an issue both locally and nationally.
- Staff in key agencies and the public at large need deafblind awareness training.
- Voluntary and statutory organisations need to improve their co-operation.
- There should be strategies for dealing with emergency situations, such as a fire.

The seminar was funded by *North West Together We Can* and organised by the Salford Deafblind Network and DeafBlind UK.

School of Participation, Wilson Carlile House

Community Pride has been pioneering schools of participation since 2005. They are based on the work of the Brazilian educationalist Paulo Freire, and offer people the opportunity to design a programme of learning based on their own issues and ideas. Community Pride's schools of participation are accredited by Manchester Metropolitan University and allow participants to become associate students and to receive certificates.

Wilson Carlile House is a hostel for homeless men in Longsight, Manchester, which was run by English Churches Housing Group (ECHG). It has room for 35 men. A further 10 live independently in the local community but are still supported by the staff.

During 2007, ECHG merged with the much larger Riverside Housing Group. The merger caused a great deal of upheaval and the impact on staff and residents was considerable.

The School of Participation focused mainly on the issues the men were facing as a result of the merger. Residents felt the new culture was more focused on performance and targets than on care and support.

Around 38 men attended the school, with 12 to 15 coming regularly. This represented a real achievement, given the number of challenging issues in men's lives.

The school consisted of 14 two-hour sessions. To start with, the residents thought about the issues they wanted to address and the skills they felt they needed to develop their ideas and plans for action.

The men identified major issues on three levels: personal, group and wider society. On a personal level, the men highlighted issues such as confidence building, listening skills and working as a team. At the group level, they wanted to look at relationships with staff and what they felt to be a lack of appropriate support at the hostel. On a wider level, the key issues were the ethos of Riverside Housing, which seemed to be very different from ECHG, and the lack of accommodation for men leaving the hostel.

At the beginning of the process, one of the men living independently offered to act as a volunteer and help with the recruitment and support of participants. His leadership turned out to be crucial to the success of the project. He had been a chef and organised the men to prepare a meal for each session; he motivated the men and often challenged them in a way that they accepted.

As well as dealing with issues arising from the ECHG merger, the school identified a much wider issue: the lack of housing for homeless people to move into once they have been through the hostel system. Community Pride hopes to support the men in tackling some of these bigger issues through their networks on a local, regional and national level, including a visit to Parliament to lobby ministers.

Find out more about the North West Citizenship and Take Part Network

Contact: Shahida Sidduqe or Tanja Loncar,
Community Audit and Evaluation Centre,
Manchester Metropolitan University,
799 Wilmslow Road, Didsbury,
Manchester M20 2RR

Telephone 0161 247 2152/2114
Email nwcitizen@mmu.ac.uk

Community Pride can be contacted on:
0161 231 4111

2 Impact Case Studies

Local authorities throughout the North West were asked to provide examples of the impact of their community empowerment activities. Twelve projects were put forward, which are described briefly below.

The Cheethams, Blackburn

Drug abuse and violence were the norm in Lawrence Street, Blackburn – until local parents decided enough was enough. A group of them got together, raised funds to buy a derelict pub, and converted it into a youth centre. Within four years, the demand for policing had dropped by 70%. The centre, known as The Cheethams, offers resources such as IT support, careers advice and leisure activities.

Yemeni Community Association, Eccles

Three Yemeni groups in Eccles joined forces to secure a tenancy on a building they could use as a community centre. The aim was to tackle feelings of isolation, inter-generational breakdown, ill health and lack of education and language skills. The centre is now a focal point for service delivery. Police in Salford have designated it as a hate-crime reporting centre and hold regular meetings about antisocial behaviour. Other activities include stop smoking sessions, breast screening and classes in IT, English language and dance.

'Drug abuse and violence were the norm in Lawrence Street, Blackburn – until local parents decided enough was enough'

Syke Area Strategic Partnership, Rochdale

An empty and neglected pond in the Syke area of Rochdale was the unlikely catalyst for a fruitful partnership between local residents and service providers. The Friends of Syke Pond was a group of local people who wanted to refurbish the pond, which was in many ways a symbol of how local people felt undervalued and marginalised. When the friends applied for support, council officers began to notice that the area had many hidden problems, such as crime, drug and alcohol abuse, and racial tension. Rochdale Council provided resources to restore the pond, and used the new working relationship to found the Syke Area Strategic Partnership.

The partnership now manages a community centre, and has provided many different activities, including training, outreach work and support to newly formed groups. Since the start of this work, local crime has fallen by more than 50%.

Parkside Youth Station, Barrow-in-Furness

Following complaints from residents about large groups of youths congregating on the street, a young people's centre was set up. The centre, which has continually involved young people in planning and development, now offers accredited courses, support with school work and advice on emotional and health issues.

PART I: inspiration**‘The Parkside Youth Station continually involves young people in its planning and development’****Sports United, Rochdale**

Sports United used workshops and sports coaching to tackle high levels of racial tension and territorialism among young people from deprived areas and disadvantaged groups in Rochdale. The coaching and workshop sessions ran over 10 weeks and were designed to help different groups of young people understand each other. Issues covered included racism, health, territorialism and peer pressure.

Restoration Thomas, Salford

Concern over the fate of a vintage steam engine brought residents and businesses together in Irlam and Cadishead, Salford. The engine, affectionately known as Thomas, had been used in the Irlam soap works but was then moved to Prince’s Park for children to play on. Unfortunately, it became a focus for vandalism and littering.

Nobody wanted to lose the engine from Irlam, but restoration and relocation costs were estimated at over £10,000. A campaign began in the local newspaper and engineering company Birse Civils, which was building a new bypass in the area, offered expertise and donations in kind.

Following lengthy negotiations between Birse and a range of local organisations, Thomas was successfully restored, relocated and launched as a public art feature on the new Cadishead bypass.

Fairfield Lane traffic calming, Barrow-in-Furness

Traffic calming measures were installed on a busy road near a school after residents voiced concerns to their local councillor. The councillor, with the support of Cumbria Highways, the neighbourhood development officer and the Barrow local committee of Cumbria County Council, set up a forum where residents could explore solutions to the problem. Average speed along the road has fallen from 30mph to 21mph since the traffic calming was introduced, and relationships between residents and the Barrow local committee have been strengthened.

Waterside multi-agency problem solving, Colne

The Waterside area of Colne is one of the most severely deprived in Pendle. When the police and the borough’s community safety partnership held public meetings in an effort to cut crime in the area, the majority of complaints raised by residents were not crime-related but focused instead on environmental degradation. It became clear that a multi-agency partnership was needed to find solutions to longstanding problems.

Residents were invited to take part in a ‘walkabout’ of the area with representatives from key service providers. A list of the community’s issues and concerns was drawn up, and a second event was organised, at which people were invited to prioritise these issues using maps and other materials.

After 12 months of multi-agency problem solving, Waterside has vastly improved in terms of environmental quality. Crime figures are down and house prices have risen faster than the average for Pendle as a whole.

Sure Start community participatory appraisal project, Harpurhey, Manchester

Participatory Appraisal (PA) is a way of enabling local people to identify their own priorities and make their own decisions about the future. It uses visual and flexible tools to ensure that everyone can join in regardless of background. Sure Start’s volunteer and development officer made it possible for a group of parents to be trained in PA techniques. Two of the participants went on to start a limited company which carries out consultation exercises using PA.

Gremlins Cycle Library and Workshop, Oldham

Gremlins Cycle Library and Workshop is a not-for-profit operation that refurbishes used bikes and sells them at low cost. Many people have benefited from the scheme, including long-term unemployed people, who have been trained in bicycle repair and maintenance, and people who could not otherwise afford a bicycle.

Others have got involved in a ‘train the trainers’ project, so repair skills are shared within the community. People who would not have considered cycling in the past have tried a group taster session.

Gremlins grew out of a community partnership project between the local authority and Groundwork funded through the single regeneration budget, which highlighted concerns about recycling, fly-tipping and landfill issues.

Education attainment of Yemenis, Somalis and black British in Liverpool

Parents, academics, councillors and community groups have joined forces to boost the educational attainment of Yemeni, Somali and black British children in Liverpool.

Liverpool Hope University undertook research into why Yemeni and Somali pupils were not succeeding; the local education authority provided data about education attainment and ethnic monitoring; and Yemeni, Somali and black British community groups were invited to a series of presentations and meetings. The city council allocated funding for the cost of publicising and disseminating the research report.

In response to the research findings, Liverpool education authority has drawn up a 21-point action plan.

Getting Closer to Neighbourhoods, Knowsley

A spate of racist attacks in an area of Knowsley led community development workers and partners to carry out an extensive piece of engagement and development work. Knowsley Borough Council says this work has increased the activities available in the neighbourhood, improved community cohesion and got more people involved in decision-making. Communication between agencies and residents has improved, the council says, and service delivery is now better co-ordinated.

Find out more information about any of these projects:

Contact: Eve Davidson,
Programme Manager,
North West Together We Can
First House, 367 Brinnington Road
Brinnington, Stockport, SK5 8ED
Telephone 0161 474 4544
Email eve.davidson@nwtwc.org.uk
Visit www.nwtwc.org.uk

PART II: innovation

1 Participatory budgeting

Participatory budgeting is a way of bringing local communities closer to decision-making around public budgets.

It is a flexible process, which has been used in varying forms across towns and cities of all sizes in many different parts of the world. It helps citizens get involved in local democracy and ensures public services meet needs that local people have identified.

At North West Together We Can's launch conference, which attended by more than 200 people, a total of £40,000 was distributed to 14 different projects through a participatory budgeting exercise to demonstrate how it can work. Details of a selection of the projects supported are below.

Peer parenting group

Strengthening Families Strengthening Communities (SFSC) is a parenting programme run by the Racial Equality Foundation. Last year a Barnardo's volunteer won funding to mentor three local parents as they trained to become SFSC facilitators.

The mentor then helped these parents to go into the local community to deliver a SFSC course alongside a member of Barnardo's staff.

An evaluation of this course showed that all the parents who took part felt they had improved their relationship with their children, learning new ways of dealing with them and gaining increased confidence in their parenting skills. They all learned effective anger management

techniques, and some were able to make better use of resources in their communities as a result of attending the course. They also enjoyed meeting each other, sharing ideas and encouraging one another to try new things.

The three parents who trained as facilitators will now go on to deliver new courses. One will co-facilitate the course in the local Bangladeshi language with a member of Barnardo's staff, and another is preparing to co-deliver a young parents' course. All three have used their training to develop both personally and professionally. One plans to enter further education, one is working part time in community development and another plans to return to work in the near future.

Team leadership in active citizenship

Proud City, a Salford-based social enterprise that is a national leader in training for active citizenship, supported two community activists in learning skills as team leaders.

Bernadette Wright is the founder of the LHARA (Local History and Regeneration Awareness) club, which uses local history and digital photography to bring people together to share their experiences of local life. Proud City is providing her with the experiences and training she needs to qualify as a team leader in active citizenship.

Louise Englefield has a track record in community sports and volunteer programmes and was one of two people who set up Pride Sports for the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community. Proud City helped Louise to develop the Pride Games event as a social enterprise and will soon receive her team leader certification.

Community carbon challenge

Action Climate Change Tattenhall (ACCT) is a lively community group with the long-term goal of making the village of Tattenhall carbon neutral. A £5,000 grant from NWTWC enabled Energy Projects Plus (EPP), an energy efficiency organisation, to help Tattenhall towards its target.

The first project was an audit of Tattenhall Primary School, whose indoor swimming pool contributes to its high energy costs. EPP was able to offer advice on changing the boiler. EPP and ACCT have been working together to measure the carbon footprint of the village, producing energy audits for a range of different houses and recommending ways of making them more energy efficient.

East Salford Neighbourhood Management Team

East Salford Neighbourhood Management Team (NMT) delivered two events to engage with people who

were under-represented in local consultation mechanisms - young people and migrant workers.

International open day

The NMT has been working with Oxfam to support newly arrived migrant workers in Salford. Feedback from a series of workshops suggested members of the Czech Roma and Congolese communities did not feel sufficiently involved. An international open day was organised to help rectify the situation.

A total of 170 people attended the day, including 110 people from the Polish, Czech, Bulgarian, Romanian and Congolese communities, and 60 staff from local agencies. The day included food and entertainment as well as advice. Feedback was mostly positive, and the day produced a range of pointers towards developing culturally sensitive services for emerging communities.

Youth surgery consultation

A six-week consultation with young people in east Salford resulted in a list of things they considered 'tops' and 'pants' about their area. The analysis showed that young people from different local communities share a range of concerns about their local environment, policing and the need to improve parks, facilities and schools. They also commented on which organisations did and did not appear to listen to them.

As a result of the survey, the young people recommended holding four youth surgeries a quarter, each dealing with different areas of service provision.

A first-aider on every street

The British Red Cross has a big vision for the Wirral: to train one person on every street in emergency first aid. NWTWC provided money for a pilot project to train 400 individuals as a first step towards this goal. Volunteers trained local residents in the skills needed to preserve life in emergencies while waiting for an ambulance to arrive. The training focused mainly on responses to chest pains.

Broughton in Bloom

Irwell Valley Housing Association and Albert Park Residents Association organised an In Bloom event in the Broughton area of Salford. Activities included a planting day at a sheltered housing scheme and visits to local schools to help children plant up pots and hanging baskets. The event aimed to improve the appearance of the area and develop local people's skills and confidence.

Open Door project

The Open Door project run by Wigan and Leigh Council for Voluntary Service aims to develop a community resource centre where people from black and ethnic minority communities can meet and access services, including advice and English language lessons.

Your Neighbourhood Matters

Your Neighbourhood Matters events were organised by the Liverpool Community Network and held in each of the five Liverpool City Council neighbourhood management areas. They brought voluntary, community and faith groups together with local councillors, residents and other public sector partners to encourage groups to get involved in shaping their local neighbourhoods. The events were also an opportunity to consult on community cohesion and to display information from public sector organisations.

Find out more information about any of these projects:

Contact: Eve Davidson, Programme Manager, North West Together We Can, First House, 367 Brinnington Road, Brinnington, Stockport, SK5 8ED

Telephone 0161 474 4544
Email eve.davidson@nwtwc.org.uk or
Visit www.nwtwc.org.uk

For more information on participatory budgeting contact: Participatory Budgeting Unit, c/o Church Action on Poverty, Central Buildings, Oldham Street, Manchester, M1 1JT
Telephone 0161 236 9321
Visit www.participatorybudgeting.org.uk

PART II: innovation

2 Black and minority ethnic VCS public service contracting and delivery

One North West, the regional black and minority ethnic strategic body for the voluntary and community sector in the North West, has been investigating how to support groups that want to get involved in delivering public services.

The Government is committed to giving voluntary and community organisations (VCOs) a much wider role in delivering public services. This move comes at a time when many traditional sources of grant funding are being eroded and there is a growing interest in social enterprise and other forms of income generation as VCOs seek to diversify their funding bases.

In the North West, there are many black and minority ethnic (BME) VCOs which could take advantage of the new opportunities in commissioning, procurement, contracting and public service delivery. However, many of them are not ready to manage contracts, a characteristic they share with other specialist VCOs across the UK. They need more support to help them prepare for these new roles.

To this end, One North West secured funding from North West Together We Can to pump-prime a procurement support service for the BME VCS in the region. They engaged a consultant, Loretta Hurley, to carry out the project, which was conducted mainly in February and March 2008.

The project's objectives included:

- mapping the location and nature of existing procurement support services;
- carrying out a procurement support needs analysis with BME VCOs and public sector organisations, identifying barriers to accessing support and making recommendations on how services should link up;

- designing collaboratively a procurement support service for the BME VCS;
- developing an outline business plan for the procurement support service.

The work was carried out in February and March 2008. Following this activity the focus shifted from the language of 'procurement' towards the more inclusive language of 'public service contracting and delivery'. The consultant then came up with a proposal for a pilot project with the working title of North West Deliv3rS.

The pilot would aim to:

- identify and fill gaps in support services for public service delivery by testing a regional e-mentoring and peer support scheme, and a self-organising online network of VCO managers;
- raise standards by testing face-to-face support and training, with a special focus on BME VCOs, through a team of public service delivery champions working at sub-regional and local levels;
- enable communication and collaboration at regional level by creating a single, sustainable, regional information portal; and
- give the voluntary and community sector a voice in commissioning and procurement at regional level, by providing a regional liaison officer to collect information on public service delivery and maintain contact with strategic regional bodies.

'the Government's move to increase VCOs' delivery role comes at a time when there is a growing interest in social enterprise'

Find out more:

Contact: Paul Harris,
One North West, 2nd Floor,
Albert House, Bloom Street,
Manchester M1 3HZ.
Telephone: 0161 236 6493
Email: paul@nwnetwork.org.uk
Visit www.onenorthwest.org.uk

3 Gender and participation

The Gender and Participation Unit, based at Manchester Metropolitan University, has run numerous training sessions on women's empowerment and gender awareness. It has also set up a website as a resource for community groups and statutory organisations, and forged links with many groups across the region.

More than 215 people have been involved in the different parts of the training project. Participants came from a wide range of community, voluntary and statutory organisations. They included young mothers, asylum seekers, minority groups, local women, young boys, female councillors, regeneration workers, civil servants, students, professionals, youth and community workers, and volunteers, some of whom had disabilities.

The unit has developed a pool of trainers. Eight people took part in a combination of training sessions and field work – shadowing and co-facilitating gender training and women's empowerment sessions. These people now have the skills and experience to design, plan and deliver gender workshops themselves.

A series of participatory workshops and associated training materials on gender awareness and women's empowerment has also been developed. These programmes could be facilitated by others in the future with a small amount of training.

The unit is also undertaking work around the theme of gender and public bodies. Among the activities so far are a 'Women in Governance' focus group and a course in gender and regeneration. The focus group, supplemented by questionnaires and interviews on gender awareness, has encouraged local councillors to reflect on the barriers women face in getting involved in

decision-making, and has generated new ideas for promoting women's involvement.

Although the project is in its early stages, more than 55 councillors from over 25 councils have already expressed interest in the results and are willing to collaborate further.

The discussions are creating an opportunity for people in the public sector to consider new ways of promoting people's involvement in politics. Conversations with women councillors, for example, have revealed the great importance of role models in encouraging them to take up decision-making positions. The unit has also:

- produced a questionnaire on gender and community engagement that can be used to obtain baseline data, assess progress and design appropriate gender training and support for civil servants, local authorities and service providers;
- collected and processed new data on gender and community engagement in the North West;
- started to map work being done by local authorities and universities in the North West on either gender issues or women's empowerment programmes;
- distributed more than 100 copies of a leaflet about considering gender in community engagement activities, and other materials on gender and participation;
- attended events and conferences to disseminate practice and learning and to learn from others.

The work has shown that awareness of gender issues is generally low. Despite the efforts of many, and the existence of the statutory gender equality duty, there remains a lack of understanding of how gender issues affect both our personal lives and the wider public arena. The small amount of work the unit has done to date with the community, voluntary and public sectors has underscored the need for gender training at different levels in the North West.

On a brighter note, the work has also shown that there is a growing interest in addressing gender issues in both the public and voluntary sectors. More people are finding gender equality relevant to their work. There is a great desire to learn about gender equality and how it could affect community engagement and service delivery.

Find out more about gender and participation

Contact: Carolina Oteyza, The Gap Unit,
Manchester Metropolitan University,
799 Wilmslow Road, Didsbury,
Manchester, M20 2RR
Telephone 0161 247 2134
Email gapunit@mmu.ac.uk
Visit www.ioe.mmu.ac.uk/caec/gap_unit/

4 Community empowerment research

Funding and support for community empowerment in the North West, and nationally, has been a contentious issue, with widely differing views on what is adequate. To help throw some light on this debate, *North West Together We Can* funded detailed research on the state of support across the region.

Voluntary Sector North West, in partnership with the North West Community Empowerment Networks Forum, carried out this research to identify the future of community empowerment activity funded through local area agreements (LAAs). It focused especially on community empowerment networks (CENs) and other voluntary and community sector organisations carrying out a similar function.

The researchers sought to identify how local authorities are delivering community empowerment in areas without a CEN; the type of activity undertaken; the current level of funding for CENs; and the VCS activity in areas without a CEN.

Background

Since April 2008, LAA funding has ceased to be targeted and ring-fenced

‘the plan focuses on the participation of citizens in decision-making and the development of a sense of citizenship’

into four themes; instead the funding streams have been merged into a single pot, known as an area based grant (ABG). In addition, local authorities have gained increased flexibility over the use of their mainstream resources with the moving of over £4bn of grants into ABGs, thereby increasing what is available to support local priorities. In two-tier authorities it is the county’s decision as to whether they retain this grant for delivery of the LAA or allocate it to the district.

The working neighbourhoods fund has also been introduced this year. It is part of the ABG and made up of the former neighbourhood renewal fund (NRF) and the Department for Work and Pensions’ deprived areas fund. Its aim is to facilitate more concentrated, community-led approaches to get people in the most deprived areas back into work.

Key findings

The majority of LSPs in NRF areas had a community engagement strategy, but only a minority of those in non-NRF areas. However, there is evidence of community engagement and empowerment activity in all non-NRF areas. This work is mainly undertaken by a CVS, whether or not it receives funding.

Funding

In 2007/08 a significant majority of CVS organisations did not receive funding for their community engagement and empowerment work. What funding there was ranged from £5,000 to £15,000 and was usually linked to specific projects. In the same period, funding for CEN work was said to range from £30,000 to more than £1m.

Most LSPs told the researchers they considered their budget for CEN work to be ‘fairly adequate’ and one described it as ‘very adequate’.

CEN funding in 2008/09 appears uncertain. There is evidence of some funding being reduced or discontinued. As far as CVSs are concerned, it seems possible that where funding did exist in 2007/08, it is likely to be reduced.

Activity

All CVS respondents maintain at least one network, but the number of networks does not compare with those of CENs. All CENs operate at the neighbourhood level to influence neighbourhood renewal decisions, but only five CVSs undertake similar work.

Most CENs and CVSs engage in outreach work to encourage and maintain engagement from the voluntary and community and build its capacity. Six CENs have a small grant programme to

support this work, but only two CVSs have similar grants.

All CVSs and CENs are represented on LSPs, and most are represented on the LAA partnership. All CENs provide support for LSP representatives, but none of the CVSs that responded do so. However, most LSPs said they provided support to develop the skills and knowledge of voluntary and community representatives.

Both CENs and CVSs provide other forms of community empowerment work in their role with the LSP and LAA. These include providing information; training; delivering services to meet LAA targets; providing opportunities for personal and organisational development; and undertaking equalities work.

Both CENs and CVSs were able to provide examples of how their work adds value to the work of the LSP. This included bringing local knowledge, expertise and experience to inform and guide the LSP; and informing the design and delivery of services.

All NRF LSPs are either ‘fairly’ or ‘very’ satisfied with the involvement of the voluntary and community sector in LSP decision making. There was a slightly lower level of satisfaction with their involvement in the creation of the LAA. This is consistent with the views of CENs. Most LSPs undertake community

engagement and empowerment work in addition to the activities they fund. This is in the form of citizens’ panels, neighbourhood management activity, local area partnerships, health networks, ward committees, parish councils, community planning workshops and in association with the voluntary sector compact.

The future

CENs are uncertain about their emerging role in delivering community empowerment and engagement with the LAA since the introduction of the ‘single pot’. Some believe services will remain; others think they will retract; and some believe they will close.

Many CVSs are also uncertain about the future, but as most did not receive any funding for the work they undertake it is difficult for them to identify exactly what might change.

Find out more about community empowerment research:

Contact: Margaret McLeod, Voluntary Sector North West, St.Thomas Centre, Ardwick Green North, Manchester M12 6FZ

Telephone 0161 276 9303

Email margaret.mcleod@vsnw.org.uk

Visit www.vsnw.org.uk

PART II: innovation

5 Youth research

On behalf of Together We Can, The North West Regional Youth Work Unit has been mapping and researching examples of participation of young people across the North West.

The research has included mapping organisations supporting youth participation alongside an in depth group consultation with staff in this field.

As part of the research, NWRWU also worked with young people from Liverpool Youth Engagement team to conduct group interviews with young people from across the region, identifying barriers for participation and making recommendations for change.

The research, including a video diary of the young peoples work is available at <http://www.nwrywu.org.uk/nwrywu/participationdetail.lasso?id=402>

Find out more about youth research:

Contact: Dan Moxon,
North West Regional Youth Work Unit
Telephone 01925 295837
Email info@nwrywu.org.uk

PART III: interaction

1 Action Learning Sets – Faiths4Change

Faiths4Change ran a series of successful Action Learning Sets for community development workers in Liverpool, Burnley, Preston and Manchester.

Action Learning Sets enable people who are working or volunteering in a similar situation to come together with a trained facilitator. Participants take it in turns to present a particular challenge they are facing and the set members ask questions to help the presenter come to a deeper understanding of the issue. The set helps the presenter to review his or her options and decide on action. Each set develops into a mutual support network, a continuing group resource that can develop over time.

Faiths4Change (F4C) created the Action Learning Sets for three reasons:

- to allow faith groups to connect with the wider regeneration community
- to ensure that the learning from Operation Eden (the forerunner to F4C) was shared with the wider community development network in the North West
- to enable F4C to play its part in supporting community learning and cohesion and improving leadership skills across the sectors.

Each set met for three sessions lasting two hours. Each meeting focused on a different theme, such as community engagement, environmental sustainability, and diversity and equality.

Some of the challenges presented were:

- How do we embed the principles of community engagement across an organisation and make community working an enjoyable priority for all staff?
- How do we engage more people in unusual projects?
- How do we measure success in community engagement?
- How can young people be encouraged to be considerate of their environment (both locally and in a wider sense)?
- How do we sustain positive, diverse and welcoming participation in the use of community gardens or space which will continue to be led by the community?
- How can we attract more male volunteers to projects, and so have a more diverse volunteer profile which represents the community?

A guest was invited to each meeting to give the set the benefit of their experience and knowledge. Where possible, guests were chosen because they operated at a strategic level and were likely to be able to comment and advise on the 'bigger picture'.

The Learning Sets were a resounding success. All 32 participants, who were drawn from both the public and the voluntary and community sectors, said they would recommend a Faiths4Change learning set to colleagues.

Participants said the benefits included increased awareness of the ways of tackling issues they face at work; improved networking opportunities; and enhanced self confidence and a sense that they are not alone in grappling with complex problems.

Many commented on how comfortable they felt in the relaxed and confidential environment created in the sets.

Find out more about Faiths4Change:

Contact: Annie Merry, Faiths4Change,
Ground Floor, St James' House,
20 St James' Road, Liverpool L1 7BY.
Telephone 0151 705 2162
Email annie.merry@liverpool.anglican.org
Visit www.faiths4change.org.uk

2 Action Learning Sets for local authorities

North West Together We Can Network, in conjunction with IDeA, ran a series of Action Learning Sets to give practitioners and decision-makers the chance to share their experiences of building community engagement plans and indicators into their local area agreements.

The importance of involving communities in decision making has been underscored by the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007, which lays down a duty to involve from 1 April 2009.

The White Paper that preceded the legislation states: 'The new duty to involve seeks to ensure people have greater opportunities to have their say. The aspiration for the new duty is to embed a culture of engagement and empowerment. This means that authorities consider, as a matter of course, the possible information provision, consultation and involvement opportunities they need to provide to people across all authority functions.'

NWTWC wanted to help practitioners think through some of the challenges presented by the increasing emphasis on community engagement, and thought they might benefit from the structured and collaborative approach to learning that is found in Action Learning Sets.

Local authorities and their partners were invited to apply for one of ten 'places' on the Action Learning Sets. Each 'place' was intended for two

people: a local authority officer and a voluntary sector partner; or an officer and an elected member; or a voluntary sector partner and elected member - whichever was most appropriate to their circumstances and challenge.

Applicants were asked to identify a current challenge (not one they had resolved already) that would benefit from discussion. In broad terms the approach was as follows:

First session

Each team of two presented their challenge to the group and explored initial thoughts on how it should be tackled.

Second and third sessions

Each team reported back on progress and received further challenges from other participants.

Finally, a report would be produced, summarising learning from the programme and including individual case studies.

On the first day, six local authority areas were represented. Participants soon adopted the supportive, person-centred approach of an Action Learning Set and each committed themselves to taking

'local authorities need to consider, as a matter of course, the possible information provision, consultation and involvement opportunities for people across all authority functions'

action on their community engagement challenge.

Only four areas were able to attend the second session, at which participants shared progress on their challenges and reviewed the actions they had committed themselves to at the first session. All participants gave thoughtful consideration to their own and each others' challenges, sharing their expertise, experiences and learning.

At the final session, only three areas were represented; nevertheless, participants again shared progress on their challenges, outlining what had been successful and what was proving difficult. All worked hard to support their colleagues by exploring possible solutions and again agreeing actions to take forward in their own areas.

Four local authorities subsequently wrote up case studies of the progress they had made on their specific challenge. These were: Lancashire County Council, Crewe and Nantwich Borough Council, Knowsley Metropolitan Borough Council and Cheshire County Council. Although all the challenges are different, there are some common themes and issues.

Common issues emerging from the case

study challenges included:

- The ability to influence others. This could be internally, to gain management support; as a district council seeking to inform a county-wide LAA; or as a voluntary sector organisation trying to influence the LAA;
- Community engagement channels and mechanisms;
- LAA performance indicators were felt not to reflect outcomes and activity on the ground.

Examples of the actions taken and suggestions made during the Action Learning Sets included:

- Make a clear offer or business case as to how your organisation can contribute to the LAA or sustainable community strategy outcomes.
- Establish neighbourhood networks for geographical communities, and focus groups for specific, seldom-heard voices.

Participants made suggestions for more appropriate performance indicators and valuable sources of alternative data.

The case studies, along with feedback from the Action Learning Set sessions, showed that delegates found the approach productive and NWTWC

hopes to build on this success.

It has been suggested that the Action Learning Set approach could be built into regular meetings or development activities of the Together We Can network. For example, there could be a 'support and challenge' session as part of each meeting. Not everyone would be able to present a challenge at each session, but members could take it in turns on a rolling programme.

There is a clear common issue arising from the case study challenges - that of needing to influence others. There is a need for training on the skills required to influence successfully.

A similar approach could be taken to other common issues and challenges, such as engagement mechanisms and performance indicators.

Find out more about Action Learning Sets for local authorities

Contact: Pam Booth, Principal Consultant
Improvement and Development Agency
Telephone 07766 252 847
Email pam.booth@idea.gov.uk

PART III: interaction

3 Community North West conferences

Community North West, a registered charity, is a network and communications forum for community groups and small voluntary organisations in the North West. It organised three conferences with the support of *North West Together We Can*.

Green Villages

Initiated by Tracey Todhunter of Ashton Hayes in Cheshire, which is seeking to be the UK's first carbon neutral village, and the Ashworth Time Bank, this event brought together 32 participants from about 15 community groups in Cheshire.

Participants said they had been energised by considering how to live more sustainably and felt empowered to influence decision-making in their area, as they had made personal links with policy advisors and staff at county level. They also made useful contacts with regional and national organisations that could support and advise them in future.

Inspiring Communities

Community North West ran this event in conjunction with the Cumbria Community Development Network. The programme sought to attract community activists and workers to 'inspire others and be inspired' by presentations, workshops and networking.

Representatives from a wide range of voluntary and community organisations across the North West took part. Speakers included Kate Welsh OBE, chief executive of Acumen Development Trust, and Carlisle South Cumbria Sure Start, whose presentation took the form of a short drama on community involvement. Workshops were held on topics such as rurality, social enterprise, sustainability and equality and diversity.

Grit in the Oyster

Grit in the Oyster was a regional community development conference aiming to put paid and unpaid community workers in touch with each other. It included workshops run by three key national organisations: the Federation for Community Development Learning, the Community Development Exchange and the Community Development Foundation.

Find out more

Contact: Dave Hannay, Community North West, 1st Floor, 91 Manchester Road, Nelson Lancashire, BB9 7HB
Telephone 01282 692323
Email info@communitynw.org.uk
Visit www.communitynw.org.uk

4 Learning Exchange seminars

North West Together We Can organised four Learning Exchange seminars in the early part of 2008. These are regional learning opportunities for local authority practitioners, policymakers, councillors and Neighbourhood workers who are keen to explore issues of community engagement and active citizenship.

Each seminar includes a networking lunch, a presentation from an expert in the field and a short case study. The session concludes with a structured, round-table discussion.

The aim of each seminar is to provide ideas, advice and support which can be put into practice following the session.

Participatory budgeting

The first seminar was on participatory budgeting and took place at Blackburn Town Hall.

The speakers were Mark Waters of the Participatory Budgeting Unit, and Billy Maxwell, who described his experience of participatory budgeting as Head of Neighbourhood Engagement at Blackburn with Darwen Council.

Duty to involve

The new 'duty to involve' is a key element of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007. This Seminar, held at Preston County Hall, was chaired by Councillor O'Toole Chair of West Lancashire, Lancashire

Local, and addressed by Richard Watkins, Community Empowerment Policy Adviser, Department for Communities and Local Government. Participants considered by the following questions:

- What is meant by inform, consult and involve?
- What are we trying to achieve through involvement?
- Who should be involved and how can we access hard to reach groups?
- What will be the role of authorities, their statutory partners, the third sector and business?

Bottom-up performance management and the new Comprehensive Area Assessment

This seminar, held at the Solaris Centre in Blackpool, was addressed by Jeannette York from the Audit Commission and participants discussed a Case Study presented by Stuart Pate, Head of Community, Cumbria County Council. They discussed the ways in which a bottom-up approach to performance management can improve services and looked at the priorities of the new assessment framework.

Community charters and local scrutiny

This seminar at Stockport Town Hall was addressed by Vicki Savage of the Young Foundation, who is the author of *How to Develop a Local Charter: A Guide for Local Authorities*. Participants looked at case studies from Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council on neighbourhood governance and area committee pilots.

The event aimed to outline the latest guidance and good practice, identify barriers for implementing local charters, and help delegates to learn from others who are considering implementing charters.

Find out more

Contact *North West Together We Can* for details of future Learning Exchange seminars

5 Community Development Challenge report

The *North West Together We Can* network is working hard with Neighbourhoods NW to build on the Community Development Challenge report, published last year by the Government with the aim of strengthening the role of community development (CD).

In particular, it is concerned to improve quality and the way outcomes are measured. It also wants to act urgently on the need for training.

This work has been developed through a series of events in autumn 2007 and spring 2008. These included a seminar on the CD Challenge report, a workshop at the Inspiring Communities conference in November 2007, workshops in Liverpool in February 2008; Stockport in March 2008 and Cumbria in April 2008.

A seminar, organised by Community Development Exchange (CDX), took place in October 2007 and was hosted by Manchester Metropolitan University's youth and community work course. Its aim was to seek initial responses to the CD Challenge report and identify any missing elements.

Most delegates welcomed the chance to discuss the report and were glad to see a government department acknowledging that top-down processes don't always work. Many saw it as the first attempt at a co-ordinated approach and a good starting point for further action.

In November 2007 the regional community development network, Communities North West, organised a conference entitled Inspiring Communities. The aim was to discuss a wide variety of issues of relevance to community groups and community workers in the region. One workshop looked at the CD Challenge report and ways of building on it.

This event drew out some important themes about the state of community development in the North West and helpful suggestions for future action.

The Liverpool workshop, in February 2008, offered managers and practitioners an opportunity to explore the issues and share best practice in managing CD. A consistent message was the importance of developing effective communication – both in supporting practitioners, and in making the case for CD to those who commission services and to the wider public.

Some of these key messages were reinforced in a further workshop in April, organised for community development staff in Cumbria. This event was designed to build on the achievements of an existing team. It highlighted how successful communication could win credibility for community development across a local authority.

The third workshop looked at ABCD – Achieving Better Community Development, a tool for planning, evaluating and learning from CD work. Within the training session, participants created a profile of an imaginary community and looked at its strengths and weaknesses using the ABCD analysis form. Participants were able to see how they could use it in their practice to guide their next steps in supporting the community.

NWTWC and Neighbourhoods NW plan to hold further events around the CD challenge report, aiming to build on the progress so far.

Find out more

Neighbourhoods NW
Telephone 0845 180 0175
Email info@neighbourhoods-nw.co.uk
Visit www.neighbourhoods-nw.co.uk

north west
together **wecan**

North West Together We Can First House, 367 Brinnington Road, Brinnington, Stockport, SK5 8ED

Telephone 0161 474 4544 **Email** eve.davidson@nwtwc.org.uk **Visit** www.nwtwc.org.uk