



scottish
community
development
centre

Supporting best practice in community development

VOiCE Case Studies

Community-led Approaches to Community Engagement

Suite 305, Baltic Chambers, 50 Wellington Street, Glasgow G2 6HJ
t 0141 248 1924/1964 f 0141 248 4938 e info@scdc.org.uk w www.scdc.org.uk

Scottish Community Development Centre is a company limited by guarantee registered in Scotland (361532) and a Scottish charity (SC040614)

Community-led Approaches to Community Engagement

Overview

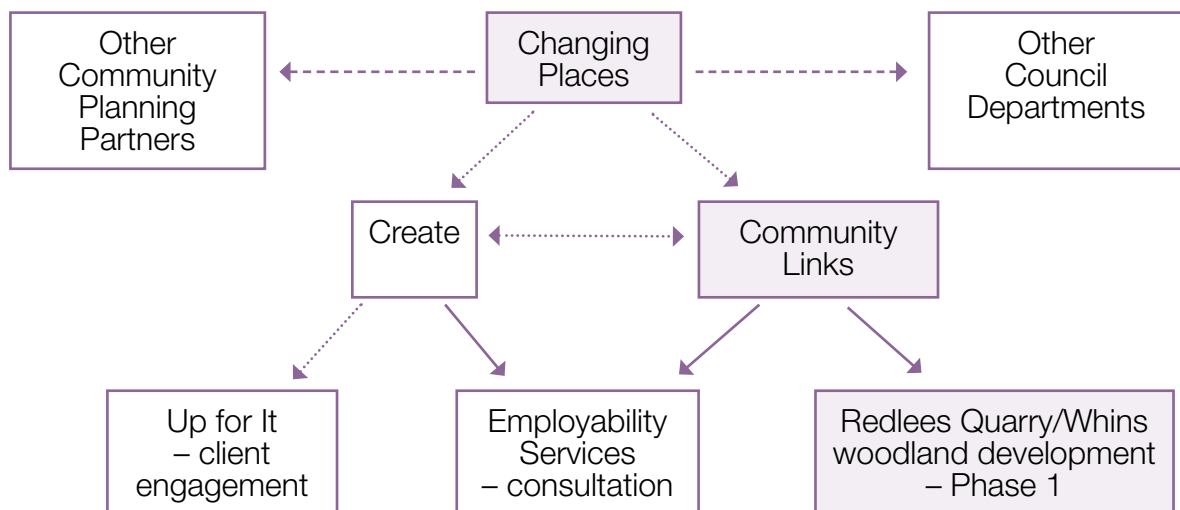
A core purpose of the South Lanarkshire Development Site was , “to build the skills of two local community based organisations, Community Links and Create, to conduct community engagement activity on behalf of a range of key partner agencies in South Lanarkshire”. The key focus for this case study therefore will be to explore how these two organisations, supported by South Lanarkshire Council’s Community Regeneration team (Changing Places), have used VOiCE, the impact this has had on their practice, the benefits that have accrued, the issues they have encountered and how it has impacted on their relationship with South Lanarkshire Council and other Community Planning partners.

Context

VOiCE has been used in South Lanarkshire by a number of different agencies and individuals, however, the core use has been by South Lanarkshire Council’s Community Regeneration team (Changing Places) and the local community infrastructure organisations - Community Links and Create. A number of VOiCE engagements were undertaken by these agencies during the Development Site period and these are described briefly in the separate snapshots papers.

Changing Places staff have supported the use of VOiCE by Community Links and Create as well as promoting and encouraging the use of VOiCE by other council departments and community planning partners. This has included valuable work in ensuring that VOiCE is located on the central IT server of South Lanarkshire Council.

The diagram below shows the main areas of use of VOiCE during the Development Site period. This case study will focus on one particular example (highlighted in yellow and blue in the diagram) of how Community Links have used VOiCE in undertaking community engagement around the development of Redlees Quarry/Whins Woodlands in Blantyre.



Key:

Direct engagement using VOiCE

Support and training for engagement activity using VOiCE

Support, promotion & training in use of VOiCE



About Community Links and Changing Places

Community Links has been in existence since 1999 as a local voluntary organisation providing a leading role in community engagement and supporting community involvement in a wide variety of local regeneration issues and initiatives. In so doing, they have established a solid relationship with South Lanarkshire Council particularly through Changing Places. This has led to the establishment of a service level agreement with South Lanarkshire Council's Regeneration Services for Community Links to undertake consultation and engagement activities on behalf of the Council. The role of Changing Places has been crucial within this, not only in relation to the direct support given to Community Links but also in relation to ensuring buy-in and commitment to community engagement from other Council Departments and other Community Planning partners.

In relation to the specific Redlees/Whins engagement, the commissioning of the work by South Lanarkshire Council did not come directly from Changing Places but undoubtedly benefited from the profiling by Changing Places of community engagement in general and the specific role that could be played by community infrastructure organisations.

Redlees Quarry/Whins Woodlands - Phase 1

This engagement relates to the first phase of the planned development of a disused quarry and area of woodland on the outskirts of Blantyre. The site had been identified by South Lanarkshire Council as derelict land which could potentially be developed for use by the wider community, for which they have received finance from the Scottish Government's Vacant and Derelict Land Fund.

The main aim of the VOiCE engagement was to consult with the wider community and ensure that any development of the Redlees Quarry site is supported and endorsed by the community. Community Links were commissioned by the Enterprise Resources Section of South Lanarkshire Council to undertake the community engagement which took place over an 8 month period in 2009/10.

Community Links had already conducted an earlier consultation about the site. In 2007 (long before they had heard of VOiCE) they were commissioned by South Lanarkshire Countryside and Greenspace to undertake an initial consultation with local communities about how they would like to see the area around Redlees Quarry/Whins Woodlands developed. From this initial consultation a 'friends of' group had been established and funding had been identified to undertake a phased process of development of the area in consultation with the local community, the first phase being the development of a feasibility study on the main options for development.

The quality of Community Links initial work saw them being commissioned again by South Lanarkshire Council to undertake the community engagement aspects of the feasibility study and VOiCE was identified as an ideal tool to frame this community engagement process. A full Analyse, Plan, Do and Review cycle was undertaken which allowed a wide cross-section of the local community to actively feed in their own views, ideas and experiences and to directly influence how the site will develop. This influence is evidenced by the fact that the first actual development will be concentrating on implementing the initial community priorities.

Using VOiCE

Community Links used VOiCE to bring together key stakeholders at different stages of the process. It was found to be extremely useful at the Analyse and Plan stages to have the full range of stakeholders involved in developing an analysis of the purposes and scope of the engagement as well as in setting outcomes. Also, by bringing together key partners at the Review stage they were able to develop a broad analysis of the community engagement processes involved in this stage of the project as well as how this will be built on and developed in subsequent phases.

Although Community Links staff were experienced in community engagement activity they found VOiCE extremely helpful in giving a more formal structure to the process and a discipline to what they were doing. It was also vital in enabling other partners to understand the principles of community engagement and to see very clearly what the process of community engagement is. One of the architects involved in the project commented that this has been the “best community engagement experience I’ve had as a private practitioner”. Using VOiCE at this stage of what is potentially a very large development project also had unanticipated benefits as it was used to gather community views/responses as part of the pre-planning consultation, something which was of clear benefit to the Council.

The role of Changing Places in relation to supporting the use of VOiCE and direct support for Community Links continues to be crucial. They are heavily involved as one of the key partners in the process and are currently exploring options for further use of VOiCE to support aspects of the next proposed stage of the Redlees/Whins Development. This will also focus on working with Community Links about their continued involvement, whether it is in directly conducting community engagement activity or supporting/training others to do so.

Review, Analysis and Learning

The benefits of using VOiCE have been identified at a number of sessions involving staff from the participating projects and other stakeholders from the development site. These were as follows:

- It is a well-recognised and endorsed tool and as such lends credibility to the evidence gathered and the process followed. It supports local organisations such as Community Links and Create in developing their own sustainability (through Service Level Agreements, funding bids, etc.)
- It supports consistency of approach to community engagement across all projects. The process is followed uniformly regardless of project status.
- Evaluation and analysis of practice is greatly enhanced both for individual projects and across a range of engagements.
- VOiCE has helped people to develop their outcome-focused planning. Previous work on community engagement has been largely output-focused with Community Links and Create being commissioned to undertake surveys or limited consultations with less focus on the wider engagement processes involved.
- It is seen as being an easy-to-use system which asks the right questions of participants at the right time.

Overall Outcomes

The Community Links and Create Staff Teams are now using VOiCE as an integral part of their work in terms of their external delivery (i.e. undertaking pieces of engagement on behalf of others such as South Lanarkshire Council, the Health Board, etc.).

In addition to this they are also using VOiCE to inform their own practice – Create have dedicated time at their staff meetings using VOiCE to look at their community engagement activity. This has helped to develop the team's shared understanding of community engagement and recognises all team member's contributions and views.

Using VOiCE has also helped team members to be more confident in working with other partners around community engagement as well as in developing the practice of others involved in community engagement activity (e.g. Strathclyde Police).

Changing Places role has been and continues to be vital in relation to both direct support for Community Links and Create and also in relation to raising the profile of VOiCE and overall community engagement processes across South Lanarkshire Council and other partners.

