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## VOiCE Case Studies

### Supporting a Multi Agency Approach to Engaging Older People

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# Supporting a Multi Agency Approach to Engaging Older People

## Overview

Perth and Kinross Council, NHS Tayside and the Voluntary sector worked in partnership to organise an event to celebrate National Older People's Day. The event called 'Age Matters' was held on 1 October 2009 and was specifically designed as an opportunity to advise older people of the services and information available to them in Perth and Kinross and to promote healthy living. VOiCE was used to support a partnership approach to planning the day and supporting better community engagement. This case study will focus on how VOiCE supported community engagement in the context of a multi agency partnership and will highlight the learning and benefits which were realised as a result.

## Context

The 'Older People's Consultation and Engagement Group' made up of statutory and voluntary sector colleagues in Perth and Kinross planned to hold an event which would attract as many people from the older age group as possible from around Perth and Kinross. The event was designed to inform participants about the services which are available to older people in the area and to give them an opportunity to meet the service providers from a variety of sectors. The Group recognised that this was their first multi agency thematic event of this size so a sub group was formed to take the work forward. The Sub Group included staff and managers from NHS Tayside and the Council's Housing and Community Care Department. Each partner brought specific skills and experience to the table, the NHS had some experience at consultation and the Council brought expertise in developing large events. The sub group decided that since Perth and Kinross was a Development Site for the National VOiCE Programme they could benefit from using the tool for this large scale partnership event. NHS and Council colleagues agreed that VOiCE was the right tool to plan, record and evaluate the engagement process.

Following some initial training for some members of the Sub Group by Scottish Community Development Centre (SCDC) the Group used VOiCE on their own and developed their own processes for working together with the tool. Not all individuals on the sub group had taken up the training so there were different levels of understanding in terms of the structure and terminology of the tool. The sub group met around the table and went through the VOiCE template and discussed and agreed how to plan the event. Both NHS Tayside and the Council have access to VOiCE software, however, they are on different networks and could not update the same record. It was agreed at that point that a partner from the Council would take responsibility for updating the content of VOiCE for this exercise.

In planning the event the engagement partners welcomed the fact that VOiCE helped structure their discussions and thinking, for example it supported them to develop joint outcomes and develop realistic outcome indicators. These joint engagement outcomes were used to shape the evaluation of the event.

## Using VOiCE

The Sub Group commented that VOiCE was extremely positive in this engagement process, the tool supported them to think through the main elements of the event and to highlight shared resources and contact lists which is important for joint working. As the partnership was evolving the tool supported and structured discussions and helped them to develop a clear vision based on a common language. Partners commented that in practice the tool supported them by keeping a detailed record which gave a “.....comprehensive overview highlighting responsibilities, what had been carried out and what had slipped off the agenda.”

While the Sub Group advised that it would have been useful to have the tool on a shared server or web based platform so that all partners could view the record they actually found it useful to have one moderator taking responsibility for the joint record. A partner, based within the Council, was responsible for maintaining the record and bringing it along to meetings to assess and update progress.

Another key learning point was that VOiCE was useful in maintaining continuity when partners could not attend meetings but were instead able to contribute to the VOiCE record via email. It was agreed that this was a useful mechanism to keep each of the managers up-to-date with developments and ensured their continued contribution to the development process even though they weren't always able to attend meetings. The group commented that this was an efficient way of working as it's not always feasible to get everyone around the table for discussion. This approach ensured that the engagement programme remained on track and that key people could still contribute and take ownership of the process.

The event attracted 237 residents from around Perthshire and over 40 service providers and agencies were available on the day to provide information to participants. The partners contacted colleagues in other Council and NHS services and voluntary agencies as well as the Police and Fire service to provide an information stall at the event.

Following the 'Age Matters' day members of the sub group met up to evaluate the event using the VOiCE Software. The review was supported with the evaluation forms from the service providers and delegates taken on the day. Three NHS and two Council colleagues worked through the review section of the tool. The group reported that they spent a long time on the review section because it was the first time that they had met up since the event itself and this led to numerous side discussions about different aspects of the event. Also, the group were working through VOiCE for the first time so spent time reacquainting themselves with the Standards for Community Engagement and the scoring criteria within the tool and reading many of the advice notes. The Group took extra care in wording their responses because they wanted to use the VOiCE record for wider distribution within the NHS and Council Departments. One member of the group commented that they felt that *“...the next time round the evaluation section of VOiCE will be quicker because it won't be such a new process for us.”*

It is important to note that the partners participating in the review had different ideas about the strengths and weaknesses of the engagement process. The tool gave them the format in terms of the Standards and Outcomes to discuss each of these aspects in some detail and reach a shared view of the engagement process.

As a result of working through the Review section of VOiCE the group identified key priorities for future events, these include:

- the importance of having an older person from a hard to reach area involved in the planning stage to help encourage participation
- the need for clear roles and responsibilities in future multi agency working
- the need to research more suitable venues for National Older People's Day in 2010.

