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Snapshot examples of applying VOiCE

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Snapshots: using VOiCE to plan effective community engagement

The Tried and Tested Doesn't Always Work

For several years Strathclyde Fire & Rescue has run a highly successful Integration Through Safety initiative across Glasgow. The model combines English as a Second Language programmes with the recruitment of asylum seekers and refugees as volunteer peer educators. This has proved to be a highly effective means of involving communities in addressing home safety issues.

In Govanhill, several concerns had been raised by other agencies about the safety needs and issues of the Roma Community, particularly with regard to fire/home safety and a high incidence of burns and scalds.

However, it had become apparent that establishing the tried and tested peer education model was not working. Fire and Rescue staff were finding it very difficult to engage with the Roma community. Having acknowledged that there was a problem, it was suggested that VOiCE might help to provide a means of moving forward.

The discipline of answering the questions VOiCE posed soon began to unblock the impasse. For example, What do we need to know? Illustrated the need to determine which agencies were working with the Roma Community and what the perceptions of safety were within the Roma Community. Several agencies were identified who had an interest in the focus of the engagement. An initial Stakeholders' event was held to inform other people working in the area of the proposed engagement, secure buy-in from them as potential partners and to seek ideas for action.

Partners offered resources to assist and they shared their contacts and experiences.

As a result of the discussions about effective means of engaging with the Roma Community, a new project plan was created. Fire and Rescue altered their approach to achieving the desired outcomes. Instead of attempting to recruit a group of peer educators, they agreed to change their model to work directly with young people from the Roma Community. Evidence had demonstrated that there were several ways of reaching young people as 'organised' communities. Some young people were already accessing other services, whereas older people weren't.

A group of young people has since been identified to work with Fire and Rescue as part of their ongoing Fire Reach programme. These young people will also receive information and materials about home safety which they can take directly back in to their homes.

Planning Effective Community Engagement Becomes Synonymous With Good Project Planning

The Queen's Park Performance Project in Glasgow is a national pilot project supported by the Scottish Government's Empowering Communities Action Plan with objectives to test community council capacity to lead and shape projects, to work together and with partners and to realise a project of community value.

A partnership steering group comprising representatives from 4 community councils - Crosshill and Govanhill, Langside, Battlefield and Camphill, Mount Florida & Shawlands and Strathbungo – is seeking to restore a former bandstand in Queen's Park. Their ambition is to create a community-based amphitheatre with local participation on its management board and in its programming.

VOiCE was used to help the group develop a Community Engagement Plan. By considering appropriate levels of engagement it became clear that the project needed to engage at all three levels:

- ▶ Inform raise awareness about the project.
- ▶ Consult explore potential useage and performance requirements.
- ▶ Engage identify potential partners, programme deliverers and members of a Management Group.

Given the nature of the project, distinction needed to be made between engaging individuals and engaging groups or organisations. Different roles for the community were also clarified. A set of Community Engagement Outcomes was created:

- A network of supporters is established.
- Officers and elected representatives are informed.
- Potential performers and users of the space are identified.
- A cross section of the community has been engaged.
- People are recruited on to a 'Management Group'.
- A constituted group / body which can apply for funding is established.

These outcomes greatly facilitated the development of a programme of Community Engagement activities. In turn, these activities have helped bring the project to life within the communities surrounding Queen's Park. So far when the group has had to spend some of its grant, it has done so exclusively on community engagement activity: preparing and analysing 717 questionnaires, hiring venues for events and producing compact disks and other materials for dissemination. Plans are underway to hold a design charrette which will offer opportunities for even greater depths of engagement and partnership working.

A key learning point for the Steering Group has been that independent support is critical if voluntary lead groups are developing projects which require wider community support. Sufficient resources are then required to realise meaningful engagement with interested parties.

Avoiding Consultation Fatigue

YouthBank is an innovative UK-wide grant making initiative. Local YouthBanks provide small grants to projects led by young people which benefit the community and also the young people involved. YouthBank is unique in that it is young people themselves who make decisions about how local YouthBanks are managed and run.

A YouthBank in South East Glasgow is being led by young people and is supported by staff from the Community Health & Care Partnership. It provides an opportunity to create a consistent approach to youth engagement in the South East. The YouthBank will create a two way process - benefits for young people in terms of personal development and empowerment and consultation and engagement opportunities for agencies.

VOiCE was used as a catalyst to begin:

- integrating a co-ordinated approach to youth engagement with the establishment of a YouthBank
- co-ordinating the gathering of young people's views to match partners' needs

Previous work with young people indicated that many of them were sick of being consulted and asked their views if nothing was then going to happen. The local Strategic Youth Partnership had concentrated on discussing service provision for young people without directly addressing how young people might inform and engage in the delivery of such services.

Joint YouthBank / VOiCE planning sessions with youth practitioners demonstrated that greater clarity and understanding were required about appropriate levels of engagement. Similarly, while there was evidence of young people influencing some local project work, nothing had been done to extrapolate this up to a South East level.

By asking "What do we already know?" VOiCE has provided the opportunity to collate information from previous consultations and needs assessments and hold them in one place for the whole of the South East area.

A Youth Engagement Working Group has been established which will focus on co-ordinating youth consultation and encourage greater engagement in local decision making. The group has developed a set of outcomes for youth engagement which will inform future spending plans and Fairer Scotland Fund allocation. All of this work will be fed in to the groups of young people who are leading the YouthBank development.

Engaging Communities in the Vibrant Glasgow Theme

A Vibrant Glasgow has been identified in Glasgow's Community Plan as a key theme for transforming the city into a place where people choose to live, work or visit. Culture & Sport Glasgow (CSG) was tasked by Glasgow Community Planning Partnership to lead the development of a Vibrant Glasgow. At a local level, this meant establishing what the priorities were in the South East, establishing an effective structure and ensuring that the local community, partners and service deliverers were included in the process.

VOiCE was used to assist with the whole process of creating a Vibrant Plan and establishing structures across the South East area. All four stages of the VOiCE cycle were followed.

Over an 8 month period more than 200 individuals were involved in consultation events and workshops. Staff and volunteers from 22 partner organisations contributed their ideas, skills and resources to the development of the Vibrant Plan. Many of these people have maintained their engagement through membership of the Vibrant Thematic Management Group and attendance at various events organised by the 7 Topic focused sub groups which were formed.

Issues and learning

- A dedicated officer and independent support were provided for the group to develop the Vibrant Plan and plan community engagement
- An outcome based planning approach used to develop the plan – therefore also consistent with VOiCE requirements
- People were guided through a series of specific questions and tasks which helped to ensure that the consultations remained focused across a variety of topics
- The Vibrant Plan was redrafted several times based on the ongoing consultations and development work
- Local people and organisations had opportunities to engage at different and appropriate levels: at events and workshops, through the Vibrant Thematic Management Group and the various emerging sub-structures
- Informal and interactive methods were used to engage people – ranging from drama, drawing and model making to market place stalls and the nominal group technique

Impact

Within the South East of Glasgow, the experiences of using VOiCE within the Vibrant theme have proved very beneficial. The database has proved an invaluable resource in pulling together all the component parts of the process and acted as an effective information management system. All partners are able to see the progress made and follow how various consultations influenced subsequent action.

Clear community engagement outcomes and the planned delivery of a programme of different activities has demonstrated that effective Community Engagement can be designed, shared and monitored.

Partner agencies, local organisations and individual members of the community have all reported that they felt a sense of ownership for the Vibrant Plan and that they had truly influenced its content and implementation. As a result, levels of motivation and commitment have remained consistently high a year later.

Having Your Say on Policing

The focus of the engagement was for Strathclyde Police (Better Blantyre) to develop their engagement practices and generate responses from local residents which would contribute towards the Local Police Priorities and any plans for appropriate local divisions. The local division had already started on the consultation but were unable to commit the time to undertaking the full process and so Community Links (the local community infrastructure support organisation) were commissioned to ascertain the views and opinions of local people with regards to their neighbourhood, local police and local policing priorities.

Community Links used VOiCE to plan and carry out this process. After doing this they then presented an analysis of findings to Strathclyde Police (Better Blantyre) which has led to them being requested to develop a wider analysis for the whole of the local division (Blantyre, Uddingston and Bothwell).

A further development from this is that the local Police have requested training in the use of VOiCE in order that they can develop their own community engagement practice.

Young People Influence Design of Facilities

This piece of work was undertaken by Changing Places (South Lanarkshire Council's Regeneration Team) and was designed to engage young people in the development of the youth space within Fernhill Integrated Community Facility in Cambuslang. The aims of the engagement were for young people to influence the physical design of the youth space as well as the services delivered there. A range of interactive events and sessions were held which allowed young people to be fully involved in contributing to the design of the youth space as well as the services that will be delivered there. Physical plans for the building have been developed as a result of these sessions and there has been extensive feedback to young people and the local community.

Changing Places staff used the trigger questions from VOiCE throughout and found it particularly useful to help them agree shared aims and negotiate parameters for the engagement with the main partners/ stakeholders. Using VOiCE helped to lend discipline to the process and helped the partners set realistic timescales.

An interesting development was that, although the primary focus was the use of the Community Facility, the engagement led naturally to wider discussions with young people about their feelings about the area and what the key issues were for them growing up in Fernhill.

Up for It? – Client Engagement in Health Improvement

This piece of work was designed to assist the Up for It? Health Improvement programme in South Lanarkshire to widen their client engagement and gain feedback from service users on the services provided by Up for It? (particularly their health checks). The preferred level chosen for the engagement was 'consult', although it was intended that the information gathered would be used to influence service design. Despite changes in the core staffing mid-way through the process a full VOiCE cycle was undertaken which has led to improved levels of knowledge about best methods of engaging service users and identification of barriers to service users being involved.

A major issue for this piece of engagement was the lack of continuity in terms of staff involved but an unanticipated benefit of this was that the new workers were able to bring a fresh approach and fresh thinking to the use of VOiCE in this context. Another really positive development is that the learning from this process will now directly influence how Up for It? engages with its service users and it has definitely led to fresh thinking about service user involvement and positive changes to practice linked to this.

Users Views of Employability Services

This piece of work was undertaken jointly by Create and Community Links along with Employability Services of South Lanarkshire Council. The purpose of the engagement was to consult service users about the services they receive and to feed this into a service redesign process. Create and Community Links designed the engagement methods and undertook direct engagement with service users over a 6 month period. Both Create and Community Links used VOiCE to frame the consultation and met frequently to update the database. On completion of the consultation a joint review of the process and outcomes was undertaken by Create and Community Links and this produced the following learning points:

- There were quite significant differences in the experience of Create and Community Links in carrying out the consultation – both were working in different areas and had differing levels of co-operation and response from the other agencies involved. There were also fairly significant differences in the responses from participants.
- The joint working between Create and Community Links was highly beneficial for both organisations.
- The involvement of volunteers and the development in their confidence and skills was a very positive unanticipated outcome.
- Although the consultation evaluated positively and was deemed to be robust, the VOiCE review session helped both Create and Community Links identify some areas which could be strengthened – particularly working with other voluntary organisations.

Although longer-term impact is impossible to gauge at present, one direct action has arisen namely the employment of a Customer Service Officer in one of the local Job Centres. This has come about as a direct result of the VOiCE consultation.

Community-Led Action Research

Balmedie is a coastal village in Aberdeenshire, around 13 miles from Aberdeen. A local community planning sub-group had identified Balmedie as an area in which they would like to see more community engagement. The sub group wanted to engage with people to identify local needs and were in a position to allocate funding towards these outcomes as result of planning gain monies which were available in Balmedie (Balmedie is in the centre of the proposed TRUMP Golf and Housing Development).

The local CLD service had secured some funding to carry out a community led action research project and three local people were recruited and trained as action researchers to carry this out. The action research team decided to use VOiCE as a tool to help them plan and record the engagement process. VOiCE was initially used by the team of action researchers and two local Community Learning and Development staff in a session facilitated by the CLD Strategy Officer to plan the engagement. At the end of the process the same group and a member of the Community Planning Partnership used VOiCE to self-evaluate the process.

The key lessons from using VOiCE were that

- VOiCE helped in the initial planning stages.
- The process helped co-ordinate the delivery stage.
- VOiCE proved that it is a useful tool to review and self-evaluate at the end of the process.
- Using VOiCE helped to record and capture both intended and unintended outcomes.
- VOiCE helped the team to evaluate and reflect and produced a useful snapshot report at the end of the process to inform the next stage.

Placechecks

Environment Service in Perth and Kinross Council have been using VOiCE to record the engagement process currently being undertaken as part of Placecheck. Placecheck is a method of assessing the qualities of a place, showing what improvements are needed, and focusing people on working together to achieve them. Most recently the Council have been inviting communities to express an interest in being part of the Placecheck programme. Placecheck can cover a street (or part of one), a neighbourhood, a town centre, or a whole district or city. The setting might be urban, suburban or a village. The Council are using Placecheck to improve greenspace areas/public spaces etc in a number of communities.

The Council have been using VOiCE within the Placecheck Design Team which is made up of various disciplines including Road Engineers, Community Capacity Workers and Development Planners. Users have reported that the tool is encouraging and supporting cross departmental working within the Council by recording and supporting the development of shared outcomes, appropriate methods and assigning key tasks to staff and community members. The Team report that the structured questions within the tool are ensuring that everyone within the multi-disciplined team are speaking the same language in terms of engagement and working to a shared plan.