



The National Community Development Network



Empowering Rural Communities Workshop *March 2008*



Empowering Rural Communities
March 11th 2008



in Yorkshire and the Humber



Supporting Communities
Creating Change

Report published March 2008, edited by Dr. Val Harris

You are welcome to use extracts from this report provided that you show clearly where they have been taken from.

Contents

Aims and Programme	4
Introduction	5
The Regional Empowerment Consortium – the policy context	6
Workshop 1. Parish Planning - To what extent does parish planning empower local communities?	7
Workshop 2 - Assets transfer	8
Workshop 3 - Transition Towns as a method for local communities to take greater control of their own destinies	9
Workshop 4 - techniques for involving people	10
Stories About Community Empowerment	12
Summary from 'Keynote Listener'	14
Next steps	15
List of Participants	16

Empowering rural communities – a workshop for people who support rural community groups

Held on Tuesday 11 March 2008, York

The aim of the event was to ensure that a rural perspective is included in the work of the Regional Empowerment Consortium.

The objectives of the day were:

- to ensure that people working with rural groups are aware of the work of the National Empowerment Partnership and the Regional Empowerment Consortium
- to collect examples of where empowerment and engagement are taking place in rural settings and what lessons have been learnt
- to discuss ways in which opportunities can be made available to people living rurally to enable them to be further involved in decision making.

Programme

10.00 Refreshments and Registration; sign up for workshops

10.15 Introduction to the day members of YHCDN

10.20 The Regional Empowerment Consortium, the policy context – Joe Micheli

10.35 **Workshop 1:**

Option 1: Parish planning – to what extent does parish planning empower local communities? Input by Brian Wells and Willis Ainly from Roos. Facilitated by Peter Hirschfeld HWRCC

Option 2: Asset transfer – is this empowering or just delegating responsibility? Input by Ian Cruddas, Maltby Community Development Trust. Facilitated by Dhara Thompson YHCDN

12.00 Lunch and exchanging stories about community empowerment – what is happening and what is being learnt in the region.

Wall based exercise on the evaluation model for community empowerment

1.00 **Workshop 2**

Option 1: How to use different techniques to facilitate involvement in decision-making. Facilitated by Dhara Thompson and Val Harris from YHCDN

Option 2: Transition towns as a method for local communities to take greater control of their own destinies. Input by Christina Hooley 'Hebden Bridge Transition Town'. Facilitated by Peter Hirschfeld HWRCC

2.25 Feedback from key listeners and facilitators

3.00: Finish

Introduction to the event

Dr. Val Harris of YHCDN

YHCDN – originally known as RAG-CD - was set up in 2004 from a conference hosted by the national Community Development Work (CDW) bodies, revitalised in 2006 when Hull DOC and the England Standards Board for CDW Training & Qualifications (ESB) worked together to map the Community Development training available in the region and what was needed. Their project also examined what Community Development Work was contributing to regional objectives, and as part of this they held a rural workshop in York. The project ended with lots of ideas of what Community Development Workers needed to be more effective in their practice, which we have been trying to find resources to take forward.

A small group took on to try and develop the training side, they produced a training booklet on what Community Development learning courses are available, and they have helped to get more courses going such as the City & Guilds level 4 Higher Diploma at Northern College, and they are involved in the MA development at Leeds Met. University.

YHCDN is run by volunteers as we have no staff, and we try and get money to pay for projects and events. Membership is free, and how much it does depends on the energy of its members. We meet 3 times a year as business meetings and run events as resources are available.

Recently we have been involved in Improving Reach with FCDL (the national body concerned with Community Development Work Learning) which has funded projects around the region working with BME groups and workers to improve their community development skills / knowledge.

This has supported particular groups such as Northern Network of Gypsy's & Travellers, Ukrainian communities in Hull, migrant workers in North Lincolnshire as well as some themed work e.g. BME and mental health Beautiful Minds conference, and open taster courses being run by ATL.

When we heard about the regional empowerment consortium we applied for a place and asked for funding for some of the ideas on our wish list of events, and this rural conference idea was chosen.

We think that CDW is all about empowerment, supporting social change and justice from the grassroots, but CDW is undervalued, and not always recognised. Workers around the country are being made redundant or downgraded, our skills are not recognised as it is often assumed that anyone can do it and that it will doesn't need resourcing. We wanted to use this opportunity to highlight what CDW can do to support community empowerment, and some of the issues it raises. The programme for today's reflects that.

The Regional Empowerment Consortium – the policy context

Joe Micheli

National Policy Context

- Strong and Prosperous Communities 2006
- Local Government & Public Involvement in Health Act 2007
- LGA/CLA Community Empowerment Action Plan Oct 2007
- National Empowerment Partnership
- Delivered through 9 Regional Partnerships
- Coordination of Y&H Partnership by COGS

The National Empowerment Partnership

- Demonstrate the difference community empowerment can make to individuals, community groups, communities and public agencies
- Develop effective methods of quality assurance for community empowerment
- Promote examples of good practice across the country

The Regional Empowerment Partnership

- Made up of Consortium of Partners and the Regional Community Panel
- Developing and delivering a 3 year programme of empowerment activity and practice
- Support to meeting community empowerment indicator in LAAs

So what's going to happen?

Over the next year we plan to:

- Support more practice exchange workshops & learning seminars
- Facilitate action learning sets around topical agendas, issues & challenges
- Identify examples of successful empowerment practice and share what works
- Provide access to free one to one 'mentoring' support

- Develop small scale action research studies to explore neighbourhood governance and 'youth voice'
- Enable regional networking around empowerment practice through conferences and events
- New website devoted to empowerment activity www.cogs.uk.net

More details about the Regional Empowerment Consortium and its work are in the newsletter in the conference pack. More copies are available from COGs.

Workshop Reports

Workshop 1. Parish Planning - To what extent does parish planning empower local communities?

The discussion covered the following points:

- It has empowered people to do more after the plan is complete
- It has affected changes on Parish Councils
- Not always achieved as much as expected – or where we did achieve as much as we expected it took a bit more pushing than expected
- Connections between parish plans and local authority policy are important to lead to achievable results
- Ongoing review and monitoring is very important
- Need to manage expectations about what can be achieved
- Its important to work with community groups to achieve outcomes
- Great community engagement (post parish plan) and during the exercise – the process (and ongoing monitoring and review) brings together the active members of the community and empowers them to take initiatives in a variety of ways (e.g. setting up youth clubs etc.)
- Language is very important – ‘Parish Plan’ can be off putting – use different names in different areas; maybe use Community Led Planning
- Local communities must define the plans terms of reference and title
- Good parish planning can empower communities
- Lack of funding – a problem as it means there may be a “fallow period” in Parish Planning until more funding becomes available – this could lead to a loss of momentum and expertise making it more difficult in the future.
- Its about grass roots community engagement
- Local Development Framework works at a higher level than the Parish Plan
- Need for resources to keep community development officers in place to support

Parish Plan

- Village Design Statement is Supported by a Local Authority, this is different from a Parish Plan
- Parish plans need to include all – including ‘hard to reach’ groups
- Getting service providers to come out and explain their policy helps community understand what they can do
- Clusters work collectively for common good, clustering of parishes shared the work in the Selby area
- Parish Plans can cross parish boundaries
- Concern was expressed that Rural has been mainstreamed
- Local Authority community engagement in 2009 – will leave a big hole in funding now
- Very difficult for Local Authority employees not to follow their employers agenda
- Constructive engagement with Local Authorities can sometimes be difficult due to changes in personnel and political implications
- The government doesn’t have a rural policy; issues of planning, climate change, food production; rural areas are sinks to cities and have no autonomy
- The church – similar to above but they actually need to work at Parish level
- Finance is a strategic issue – no funding
- Need for more grass roots information on what is going on / best practice from other Parish Plans

Parish Planning Key Points

- Local communities need to define terms of reference and title
- Need for resources to support groups doing a parish plan
- Funding needed to keep community development workers in place to support Parish Plans

Workshop 2 - Assets transfer

1. Importance of starting with what people need – ask the right questions; give the full picture; define need over want
2. Well planned – business model including sustainability, match capacity to the schedule, prioritise interest and start with success
3. Perceptions – overcome cynicism; independent; clean; simple e.g. all in rates for hire; walk in and work desks
4. Power and control – what is the political and Political will and support, who holds power. Clear written agreements
5. Committee – range of experience and representation; committed; people who want to do it
6. Context – not to be blinkered, keep aware of other things beyond your 'big project', which might lead to change of your plans
7. Spend money – locally and regionally; 72% in Rotherham, 90% in South Yorkshire
8. Support to groups to be involved in the process

Workshop 3 - Transition Towns as a method for local communities to take greater control of their own destinies

Transition Towns are a response to Peak Oil, this is the term used to describe the point we are at now with the decline in oil / fuel production, and the fact that there is no longer cheap oil. The government doesn't talk to us about this situation. Climate Change is caused by fossil fuels and this is affecting us and the way we live, so plans are needed to deal with it. It is important to tell people what the real situation is so they can take action. Transitions towns are one response – people in a town, village, or a hamlet come together to reduce their dependence on fossil fuels.

12-step process

1. Group to initiate process of transition town; concerned citizens need to go forward and make contact with residents in the community, to make it happen. This group will dissolve and rest of community to take over as sub groups
2. Awareness raising – organising local events – show films, engagement needs to be fun e.g. Climate Chaos Kitchen, draw people in, increase their knowledge of issues, increase participation
3. Engage with other organisations in your community, who may be active in these areas, find out what others are doing
4. The great unleashing – form working groups on topics such as transport, food, local economy, education, waste; working group looking into more specific issues related to areas of interest
5. Forming sub groups
6. Open space forum – meetings without normal structures – so all those attending are able to make their points
7. Begin to create physical manifestations, something tangible, so people see its happening
8. Facilitate the Great Reskilling – share skills, identify skills needed, look at old skills that may be lost and ensure that these are passed onto current generation
9. Building links with local government organisations
10. Honour the Elders – they have the skills, knowledge, experience that will be needed

11. Let the process go where it wants to go
12. Create an Energy Descent Plan – use your knowledge of people who will be involved, plan how whole community will create energy decent, not a negative – look at the positive outcomes

Transition Towns are about:

- Awareness raising
- Engaging
- Inspiring
- Encouraging
- No dependence on external funding
- Getting a critical mass to achieve and community champion
- Creative thinking
- Confrontational – at non funding stage its easier; with funding its not so easy to consider
- Don't alienate selves – need to consider how others see you and promote you

What participants will take from this workshop?

- Understanding of transition towns
- There doesn't need to be official support agency – they can be done through communities supporting each other
- Core group needed – minimum of 7, (10 in Hebden Bridge)
- Financial resources are not needed? (None in Hebden Bridge - all done voluntarily)
- No specific funding – some around community food issues
- Develop energy descent plan into Parish Plan work
- Terminology may need to be changed in rural settings
- Developing skills is vital
- In principle there is no issue with the concept of getting people to change their habits to take account of climate change/ carbon footprint etc.
- Bring community together behind these initiatives to drive community support and then community can drive themselves
- Awareness raising – what is in the community
- Problems with bureaucracy, lack of LA engagement

Workshop 4 - techniques for involving people

The ladder of participation – we used the Wilcox Model – and shared our ideas of what techniques we were already using for empowerment and where they fitted on this ladder.

Level	Type of participation	Techniques we were using
5	Supporting independent community initiatives	
4	Acting together	Action learning re community leadership Consensus decision making Working in partnership – Beverly Heritage Partnership Action Group meetings of agencies Networking with other agencies Cooking together
3	Deciding together	Planning for Real Peer review of resources created Disagree game Now, sooner, later Participatory Budgeting Engagement meetings with Parish and Local community groups Early Years Forum Area assemblies – devolved powers to sub borough level Community forums to influence decision-makers at neighbourhood level
2	Consultation	Visioning / planning days and events Open days Events Community participation training Meeting people in community venues, playgrounds, shops Parish plans Case study interviews Treasure trails Focus groups Survey and questionnaires Seminar programme – developing to use as tool for rural proofing LAA/ LSP Riding Around – annual LSP survey re community plan Walking The Patch Annual customer satisfaction survey Visits group to get their wish lists
1	Information	Newsletters Visual maps Taster sessions Roadshows and exhibitions One stop shop Health promotion events

What makes for effective participation

- Information that people understand
- Skills to participate effectively and to analyse who to influence, where power lies
- Community mentoring – professional or self organised; buddying schemes
- Exchange visits to learn from each other
- Starting where people are at
- Only asking what you are prepared to hear about?
- Honest, realistic expectations on all sides
- Shared understanding of impact of decisions
- Influence of planning legislation
- Appropriate participants
- Continuity for workers
- Annual contracts – mismatch when supporting groups to plan long term
- Results so people can see change is possible
- Challenge complex systems of government

A good source for tried and tested techniques online (and available to buy as a book for about £15) is www.communityplanning.net

Stories About Community Empowerment

Over lunch people shared their stories about community empowerment

An Older peoples charter was developed (by a multi agency group) to inform older people what standards they could expect from social / health care services. The local authority funded a community worker employed by an infrastructure organisation to help set up and support groups of older people to monitor the charter. Seven groups were set up across the authority region. The agenda at the charter group meetings was set by the older people and they each devised a 'work plan'. They were given a link person high in social services and also in the PCT. They invited other key people to discuss issues with their group and they visited residential care homes and hospitals to monitor the services from an older persons perspective. This was successful in giving groups access to statutory services at senior level. Groups felt they had been listened to and not just patted on the head. It was recognised that it was not always possible to get the changes they asked for but it is important to be told why. The structure and method of involvement needs to be comfortable to all – not everyone is comfortable with formal committee procedures.

Sharon Clay

An older persons forum arose from a consultation done by Teesside University on older peoples needs. A part time worker was funded to facilitate the start up, and it now has 600 members. Speakers are organised on areas of interest to older people, there are serious meetings and also a social side outside of these meetings. Other funds have been found in response to identified needs (yoga dance etc.). This enables older people to have a much greater say in what is happening in Ryedale that affects older people. There are now representatives on the strategy groups for Older Peoples Forum. There is a very strong committee, with older people now recognised as an untapped source of talent; new friendships and support

networks have developed; the reduction in social isolation has led to better physical and mental health.

Pauline Reeve

Self help group for women with mental health issues group. The members received training to be a volunteer within the group. This was empowering because it improved their self-esteem and confidence. The Health Forum members identified these needs in inner city Leeds and facilitated the group over 2 years, and the group is now self-sustaining. The members have gained skills in obtaining funding and have established their constitution and bank account. They work with health agencies. They are based in a community centre, and its location in the heart of the area is important. They have made their own DVD about their group, supported by a local arts project, and this is available for community groups, it is about women and mental health.

Sharon Hodgson

Graduate Training Programme for the East Riding; a 12 week project, with 3 graduates being based with the organisational development team. They produced a short DVD to empower managers in understanding the positive contribution and diversity that employing disabled people in their workforce can bring. This DVD challenged a lot of perceptions about perceived barriers of why it might be difficult to employ disabled people. It considered adaptations that could be made to buildings, the support available to staff and colleagues as ways of increasing the number of disabled people in paid employment. Local businesses and a range of agencies including health and educational organisations have been empowered by watching the film and assessing how they can make a positive change to both their workforce and the employment opportunities of disabled people.

Kate Jackson

Warming Skeffling Village Hall not the planet

The Parish council approached a multinational energy company about wanting a new gas boiler to heat their village hall, having seen some other facilities in neighbouring parishes. They were referred to the company's grants officer for Corporate Social Responsibility who talked to the PCC and Village Hall committee and the local authority, and took a member of the Parish Council to a Northern Rural Network event on bio fuels and renewables which sparked ideas for a wind turbine project, an energy audit of the village hall and erection of a turbine to power the hall and sell power back to the grid in order to repair and modernise the building. It also led to the decision to start on a parish plan which is on-going.

Karen

An arts festival

The post office in the village closed. There is no public meeting space. A relatively new resident – an amateur artist – organised an arts festival in the church over heritage weekend in September, with refreshments. Older people of the village came, not to see art but to talk to each other – they hadn't met since the post office closed. The withdrawal of local services disadvantages those without cars and often the older residents, a social focus is needed in each community; not least so you can see older people walking about. If there is nowhere to go, no milkman etc., then they become invisible. This means you have to deliberately visit them, which they do not like, to ensure they are safe. The church can be a valuable community asset if it can be opened up again for community use as it was until the 19th century.

Graham Ward

Can Do

Empowering local people to make decisions on small-scale projects that benefited their community. In Whitby, local people gave small grants and local Residents locally assessed them after some initial training. This created lasting change as residents were doing it for themselves and their own community. It is difficult to sustain in some areas because of the lack of support from other agencies (RSLs, Local Authority). Small grants need to be replenished but 'delegating' power was not something that these agencies were keen to engage with.

Anthea

Whitby and district area forums

These were designed to involve local communities in local decision-making. It hasn't really empowered anyone because it's the same people who do everything – Town, Parish councillors etc. So it hasn't attracted normal residents, only ones with their own agendas on previous issues, and who are not willing to work in a forward thinking, positive way. No new real issues came up from previously unengaged residents.

Putting on activities that draw people in, such as women's days, where people can have a manicure or head massage etc. and where they also have the opportunity to network and learn about things going on locally. This provides a non-threatening environment which helps people to see that it is easy to get involved in community activities and training. If you make something interesting and easily accessible people will join in, but they have to be able to see a benefit for them.

Liz Dowson

Summary from 'Keynote Listener'

1. Importance of sharing experience through networking, particularly of success, as success breeds success and imitation. Ian's tips based on setting up the Maltby centre is a good example of this.

2. Where community effort is scattered, as in a number of parish plans or similar exercises, communities should look to ways of collating common themes and issues to increase their impact and profile with those authorities whose involvement is necessary for effective action. Need to identify who will coordinate these evidence bases

3. Having identified action which cannot be tackled directly through local efforts, communities need to identify the best channels for influencing those whose help they need. Community representations on, or to the Local Strategic Partnership, which prepares and reviews the Sustainable Community Strategy for the local authority area, is key to influencing Local Area Agreements that are increasingly important in service delivery.

4. Another way of taking forward community initiatives is to see how objectives and ideas chime with existing programmes, particularly where funding or technical support is required. Thus the Transition Towns ideas may fit well with Yorkshire Forward's Rural Capitals / Renaissance Towns approach and the regional climate change agenda.

5. Community development workers are important where community empowerment depends on external kick-starting, advice and support. Where specific rural community workers are not available, communities with relevant experience may be able to fill the gap but someone needs to facilitate this introduction. (One possibility might be to explore how specialist outreach workers might

be given some flexibility by their employers to do this in the wider public interest.)

Mike Feist
Sustainability and Rural Affairs Team
GOYH

Next steps

To meet at a regional level to supplement what is already happening at local and sub regional level

To be able to keep up with government policy and to be able to influence it.

To support CDW involvement in policy work as part of their job.

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