



Report on the Communities Empowered – Making it Real Conference

9th June 2016

Education Services

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Report on the Communities Empowered – Making it Real Conference held on the 9th June 2016 at Camelon Community Centre

**Background**

In March 2013 a Community Capacity Building Seminar was held in Falkirk, with Steve Skinner as the principal contributor, and in September 2015 the South East and Central Workforce Development Consortium (SECWDC) held their “Passing the Power” Conference in Edinburgh. At the “Passing the Power” Conference the Community Empowerment Act was explained, and its relevance to Community Learning and Development considered. In particular, consideration was given to those elements of the Act seen as being most relevant to CLD, such as participation requests, local community planning, participatory budgeting and asset transfer/ownership of resources.

Following discussion between the partners in the SECWDC it was agreed to hold a further event to build on the skills developed in 2013 to take forward the themes and suggestions from the conference in September 2015. At this event it was agreed we would take forward suggestions made in September 2015 about “What Next?” in relation to the Community Empowerment Act and the role of CLD, within the context of community development, and community capacity building. It would not be a further explanation of the Act, but an opportunity for us as Community Learning and Development practitioners to consider even challenge our practice, and what we can do to put it into effect in supporting and enabling communities to take advantage of the Act.

**Organisation and Planning**

To take forward and facilitate the organisation and planning of the event a small working group of members of the SECWDC (from West Lothian; East Lothian; Falkirk; Stirling) was initiated. In addition, John Galt from Education Scotland joined the group. The group first met in February 2016 and then met regularly, taking on a spread of tasks between them, until the event took place on the 9th June.

In addition, there was regular contact and discussion with Steve Skinner to plan and programme his inputs in the context of his skills and experience, and his need to develop an understanding of the background and aims of the Community Empowerment Act.

**Stated Outcomes**

1. To increase skills and confidence to enable communities to empower themselves.
2. To increase skills in using the four building blocks of community capacity building
3. To increase understanding of the different roles that workers and communities need to take advantage of the opportunities created by the Community Empowerment Act.

**Content and Programme** (see appendix I)

The day was planned to have a balanced programme and, as such, included inputs, discussion, case studies and examples of good practice, including community contributors. To facilitate the event and to provide an external perspective we agreed it would be beneficial and important to bring in an external contributor. After discussion we agreed to engage the services of the highly regarded proponent of community development and capacity building, Steve Skinner, as our keynote speaker and main contributor, who would help us consider: -

1. The different elements of the Community Empowerment Act and what it means for community development and community capacity building
2. The skills that workers and communities will need to take advantage of the Act
3. How we can use the four building blocks of community capacity building in relation to the Act
4. What it could/should it mean for community empowerment in practice
5. What roles we should have and how we can develop these

The event, therefore, was an opportunity for CLD workers and partners to explore the challenges and possibilities implicit for us within the Community Empowerment Act, noting that these challenges and opportunities extend not just to workers, but also to communities.

There were two further aspects to the programme.

* First of all, at the Community Learning and Development Managers Conference in November 2015 Alastair McKinlay, Head of Community Empowerment had attended and had followed that up with a meeting with the CLDMS Community Development Sub Group. At that meeting he had stated his willingness to come out to meet and talk to organisations and staff groups about the Community Empowerment Act and the role of community development. Given the content of our conference it was agreed that it would be very relevant to invite Alastair along, both to hear what was being said and also to provide an input on what role the Government saw for CLD in relation to the CE Act. As such an invitation was extended to him and he kindly agreed to come along and participate.

* Secondly, it was agreed to put in place the use of social media, through Facebook, as a means of pro-actively engaging participants in commenting on the event, and in submitting comments to the consultation process on the Community Empowerment Act.

Finally, the programme was specifically designed to be participative. As well as the use of social media participants were placed in small table groups to encourage participation and which were used as the basis for break-out activities throughout the day.

**Participation**

It was agreed that the main focus for participation should be targeted at community learning and development workers within the local authorities and third sector organisations in the Consortium area. Once an idea of numbers had been attained then the event could be opened up to a wider catchment. As a result the final attendance at the event was over 60 with participants from 8 local authorities, 3 Community Organisations, NHS Forth Valley, CVS Falkirk, Craigroyston Community School, CTSI, Scottish Community Development Network, Education Scotland and the Scottish Government.

**Publicity** (see appendix II)

Advance information about the event was initially sent out for distribution on the 14th April to enable workers to plan it into their diaries, and to put forward their names as participants. At the beginning of May a further tranche of more detailed information was distributed through the Consortium partners.

**Accommodation and Catering**

The location of the event was agreed on as Camelon Community Education Centre, near Falkirk. The facility was well located for road and rail transport, and it had the accommodation to cope with the numbers, and with the programme, which required access to several rooms to hold break out activities for smaller groups. Not least, in the spirit of supporting community development we were able to engage the services of the Community Café which operated as part of the Community project housed in the facility.

**The Event and Evaluation**

As previously stated, the event was very well attended, with over 60 participants from 19 different organisations. Throughout the day there was a good buzz and high levels of participation. Participants were keen to pose questions and to put forward views and comments.

Feedback from participants was also very positive with evaluation forms being completed by 42 participants and several email responses being received from organisations.

The main points which came from the day can be summarised as follows: -

**Venue.** The aspect of the event which received the lowest score related to the venue. While great care had been taken in selecting the venue for transport, ease of access, acoustics, numbers, size, break out spaces and catering, the day was hot and the windows didn’t open. As a result, and with additional participants turning up on the day, the room became very warm and muggy. We did source fans but it did become a little bit uncomfortable for participants. A lesson learned re Scottish weather forecasting and windows!

**Programme.** Several comments were received which indicated some participants would have liked more information about the Act. However, it is relevant to note that the event was not about giving more information on the Act. This was made clear in pre-event publicity and prospective participants had been directed to information sites where they could read up and inform themselves about the Act in preparation for the event.

There were some very positive comments made – *“I think the programme was great.” ; “It really was a positive and enlightening experience; a great opportunity to hear directly from Alasdair McKinlay on the continuing progress of the Community Empowerment Act 2015 and to engage with Steve Skinner. It was also a great opportunity to catch up with colleagues old and new.”; “The content reminded me of the fundamental rationale, skills and methods of empowerment we use. It will enhance my practice, from now.”*; “*Steve’s 4 building blocks were a very clear and concise way of describing community capacity building.”*

Several references were also directed to how the programme could have been more challenging for participants, and how participants could have been challenged more. This was part of our planning discussions but it is very difficult to achieve the right balance given the variance in knowledge and preparation of participants.

The input by Alastair McKinlay was also very well received. Participants welcomed the opportunity to hear more about the Act, its contents and the links to community development. Furthermore, the opportunity to pose questions proved to be very successful and informative.

**Actions.** A crucial part of the event was to stimulate and develop actions in communities. Importantly, participants identified learning taking place, along with actions they would progress back in their communities which would enhance community development, develop understanding and awareness of the Community Empowerment Act, and enable communities to take advantage of the opportunities offered by the Act. Examples included: -

* Research participatory budgeting and how local groups may benefit.
* Feedback to local community groups and develops knowledge of CEA further.
* Use new approaches with a couple of groups I can think of.
* Will be using some skills in team planning event next week.
* Cascade to colleagues.
* Feedback to local community groups and develops knowledge of CEA further.
* Will be used within team plan - carry out tasks, support local groups to make effective use of C.E. Act for their benefit.
* Discuss the programme with other CLD consortia around the country.

**Future Events.** Taking the improvements suggested, and looking at them in conjunction with proposals for future events, gives rise to several areas worth considering. It is obvious that many workers still lack confidence, knowledge and awareness about the Act. It is heartening, therefore, to see that researching more about the Act and cascading information on it to colleagues are actions for workers. However there may be value in establishing, as suggested, localised events for workers to come together to discuss the Act and share their knowledge and experience of it. This could be flagged up by the Consortium, but should be taken forward at a local level. Such events would also enable increased networking and could include community groups.

The use of live examples was well received as part of the event and there is a suggestion that this could be developed through the use of case studies, related to the Act, which workers could write up and make available to colleagues. The Consortium could act as a collector and distributor of these but it would require the active participation and support of workers to provide the case studies.

Some further suggestions included: -

* Maybe a follow-up next year i.e. ‘Community Empowerment Act - What have we done one year on?’
* Once guidelines have been produced, come together exploring and learning from each other.
* Explore the relationship and links between the Community Planning Partnerships + Community Learning and Development, and how they can support each other.(in relation to the Act)

