

Equalities Participation Network

Meeting Notes, 29 April 2021 (online)

In attendance: Deejay Bullock (Four Pillars), Baldeep McGarry (ACC Equalities Team), Roslynn Fowler (Aberdeen Action on Disability), Fiona Rennie (Aberdeen Women's Alliance), Olushola Ajide (Fountain of Love), Zuzana Jatelova (ACC Communities Team), Fay Morrison (Community member), Carol Hannaford (Sheltered Housing), Ana Maria Suarez (Community member), Marion McLaughlin (One Stop Shop), Diego (Community member)

1) Brief introductions

Everyone introduced themselves and shared which organisation or community they're from.

2) Community Spotlight: 4 Pillars

Deejay talked about 4 Pillars, which supports the LGBT+ community in matters of Mental, Emotional, Physical and Sexual Health (the four pillars). They offer information and support on an individual basis, run a variety of groups and activities for community members and allies (including Grampian Pride), and on 1st May, they are opening a new hub/café /community space in Regent Quay. These services are vital, as the LGBT+ community faces prejudice, discrimination and hate crime (around a quarter of all hate crimes in Grampian are LGBT+ related), and are more likely to live in poverty or have mental health problems. The 4 Pillars website is: fourpillarsuk.org

3) 'What's New?'

Small group discussions with 3-4 people in breakout rooms, each sharing specific equality issues they've been thinking about this month. Discussion of what organisation(s) are best placed to deal with the issue, possible next steps, etc. Sharing 1-2 issues with the bigger group.

Lack of ESOL provision, especially beyond very basic level, accessible in terms of cost/timing, without affecting access to benefits, etc. It's an issue for many people who don't have English as a first language, and limits their ability to get jobs and integrate into wider society. Ran out of time for discussing what can be done.

Problems with visas and immigration, especially No Recourse to Public Funds, high cost of applications, confusing/ever-changing requirements, limited access to legal advice, long wait times, etc. There's a sense that immigrants are used as a money source for the Home Office; 'hostile environment' sows mistrust. It may be useful to promote some of the available resources (see below) – also a topic to discuss at a future meeting.

- emlc.org.uk – Ethnic Minority Law Centre (Scotland-wide)
- rgu.ac.uk/life-at-rgu/learning-facilities/law-facilities/the-law-clinic – RGU Law Clinic

Mental health issues from primary school bullying (not necessarily around protected characteristics) – in one family's experience, child being offered 3 options: medication, counselling once a fortnight (with a long wait before starting), or doing school work from home. None of these options seem helpful. Mental health is likely to be a problem for a lot of young people at the moment (more than 'normal' times). Resources are stretched, but it's important that school staff, parents, etc are aware of help that is available (see below). Might be worth getting in touch with a children's organisation to talk about promoting mental health services?

- abdn.ac.uk/education/research/the-bounds – online counselling through Aberdeen Uni
- mha.uk.net – Mental Health Aberdeen, counselling available for adults and young people
- samh.org.uk – Scottish Association for Mental Health, info and resources

- nhsgrampian.org/covid-19/covid-19-public-information/subpages/mental-health-support – NHS mental health support, specifically around Covid-19, including counselling
- childline.org.uk – help for children and young people, including phone/online chat with counsellors
- grec.co.uk/me-time – counselling for young people affected by prejudice/discrimination

3) Discussion of Network Summary Document (attached)

One-page document with aims and values of the Network – discussed and agreed unanimously.

4) Discussion of Community Engagement Resource (attached)

A list of community groups was compiled in the last meeting. Since then, contact information and a 'blurb' for each group was added. This was discussed, and a few minor changes were made. Consensus that it's a useful document. Anyone wanting to make further changes should contact Myshele: mhaywood@grec.co.uk

5) "What makes good engagement?"

Discussion in breakout rooms – to be summarised for introducing the engagement resource, etc.

Group 1:

- **Meet people where they're at, rather than expecting them to come to you.**
- Actually engage! (an important place to start) Get in touch with user-led organisations, make the effort to **build and maintain relationships** with them.
- People from the target group must be **involved at all stages** – not just at the margins, but central to discussions, implementation, etc, in visible ways (without expecting them to do all the work for free – there is a balance to find). Good example: in one case, the description of a group was written by people from that group, artwork was provided by artists from the group, there was a spokesperson from the group highlighted on the relevant website, etc.
- **Consider different ways of involving people, and ask people how they want to be involved.**
- One person from the target group is not enough (that's tokenism) – remember there is a **diversity of experience** within any group. **Reach out and invite diverse voices.**
- Keep information up to date, and ensure that people from the target group can access information and/or ask questions in **ways that make sense for them** by providing **multiple ways to engage**. Remember that not everyone can access digital technology, download documents, speak English fluently, read fluently, use a telephone, etc.
- Instead of just an email or website, also provide a phone number, and (post-Covid) a location or event where people can go to ask questions. **Provide information in multiple formats**, e.g. English/other languages/easy read, and video with subtitles. If people need to fill in a form, for example, it can be helpful to have a video going through the process slowly, explain what to do.
- **Ensure that you are accessible, and let people know** – don't expect people to assume you're accessible, because most organisations aren't.
- If there is an event hosted by a community you want to reach, consider asking if you can have a stall with information etc (good example: housing information at multicultural festival).
- Consider doing a 'digital open day' – or posting videos online about your organisation, department, etc – seeing a human face can make people more willing to approach/engage.

6) Date of next meeting: ??