Equalities Participation Network – October 28th 2021

Present: Dave Black (GREC), Myshele Haywood (GREC), Shola Ajide (Fountain of Love Church), Roslynn Fowler (AAD), Carol Hannaford (sheltered housing), Libby Hillhouse (NESS), Zuzana Jatelova (Sunnybank Community Centre), Fay Morrison (community member, tenants' participation group, etc), Marta Neuman (GREC social work student), Astrid Offersen (NESS), Fiona Rennie (AWA), Mackenzie Wilder (GREC social work student). **Apologies:** Christa Reid, Bertha Yakubu, Baldeep McGarry, Mateusz Lagoda, Daniel Meinel.

What's New?

In small groups, folk discussed equality issues have been on their mind over the past month:

- **Reopening services** – people have really been enjoying the return of 'in person' services, groups starting to meet again at NESS and AAD, etc. In general everyone discussed how good it's been to have face to face contact, which has been sorely missed over the past 18 months, especially for folk with communication issues.

- **…but there are still issues** – even where services are starting to reopen, there are still issues getting hold of people in offices, due to many still working from home.

- **Grampian Pride** – very positive event, approximately 2300 people took part in the parade.

- **Repatriating Benin bronze sculpture** – Aberdeen University is returning a precious sculpture to Nigeria that was looted during colonialism. Representatives from local African groups were present for the ceremony, marking an important moment in negotiating the consequences of colonialism.

Community Spotlight

No community spotlight this month; **Roslynn** agreed to talk about AAD at the next meeting, followed by **Libby** (NESS), then **Carol** (sheltered housing). Myshele is happy to help/support anyone who's not sure what to say about their organisation.

What makes an accessible and welcoming space?

Discussion in two breakout rooms, with introduction from Myshele – when we were speaking with people about equality outcomes (late 2020), people from several communities said they felt less welcome and less included in a range of different spaces. So we're hoping to put together a guide like our 'positive community engagement' tips, to highlight ways that spaces can be more accessible and welcoming. Not just physical access – though of course that's important – but encouraging diverse groups of people to **want** to go to a place, or go back there again.

Group 1 (organised by theme, not type of spaces)

General ideas around accessibility:

- **Physical access** – proper arrangements for mobility/sensory issues (without making people feel like a burden); good signage; well-lit; clear pavements outside; disabled parking, etc.

- **Geographic access** – not difficult to find the place; close to bus routes or based in communities.

- **Financial access** – low/no cost for entry; affordable for people with kids; no requirement for expensive clothing/equipment.

- **Practical access** – not difficult/confusing to book tickets etc; consistency in answers from staff when people ask questions; opening hours and event times that don't exclude working people,

certain religious groups, etc; looking at bus timetables when planning events; considering end times of events for safe journeys home.

- **Atmosphere** – friendly; proactive (staff talking to people, not waiting for them to talk to you); informal where possible (relaxed environment is much more inviting and less intimidating).

- **Diversity** – different types of activities – wider range of activities will attract a wider range of people; **representation** of diverse communities in advertising materials and within staff/volunteer teams (without putting too much pressure on individuals or falling into tokenism).

Physically flexible spaces, furniture, etc – would allow physical access for people with mobility issues; reduce frustration/embarrassment; allow groups of different sizes to do things together, etc.

- Tables in restaurants, cafés, etc – for wheelchair users, it can be difficult to get someone to a table, tricky with table legs (hitting knees, have to keep legs apart) – can be embarrassing for people; having to adjust themselves or the chair, some places you can't even move the chairs.

- Often spaces for wheelchairs are separate from other areas so a wheelchair user can't sit with their friends/family, only space for one 'carer' etc. At Pittodrie, disabled supporters have to sit at the front in the rain (this should be changed with the new stadium being built) they should get a **choice of where to sit, rather than only having one option.** Same with stairs/lifts/escalators – folk with fears/phobias should be allowed to use stairs on request (without feeling like a burden).

- **Spaces outside the city centre** – partnering with community centres etc, bringing 'real' art/culture/sports facilities/etc into communities.

- **Some community centres lack disabled access**; some parks have a lot of broken pavement, very few benches, etc which excludes people with mobility issues.

Free/low cost spaces in the city centre, flexible booking, etc – would allow groups without much money to hold meetings, workshops, rehearsals, etc – creating a wider base of people to enjoy and contribute to the cultural life of the city.

- Examples: Aberdeen Uni BAME forum struggled to find a place to host quiz nights – uni has rooms but requires booking months in advance; difficult to find spaces to promote things from different cultures, e.g. Lithuanian art exhibit – Central Library was suggested, but wasn't accessible for all.

- **High demand for existing spaces** – limits exhibitions etc to very short time frames (one day or one week), forces people to use non-obvious spaces (library for art exhibit, etc), making it difficult to attract people – also difficult to find things as a spectator.

- Often the only free meeting spaces in the city centre are in pubs, which excludes people under 18, those who don't wish to be around alcohol for religious reasons, recovering addicts, etc (many spaces also noisy or otherwise unsuitable). Church halls are also used, but even where non-religious people are allowed to book spaces, this can feel uncomfortable, exclude people from different religions, LGBT+ people in some churches, etc.

- Where available, university venues often feel excluding to people from deprived areas – 'not for the likes of us' – even when they live very nearby (Tillydrone etc).

More diversity/flexibility/visibility of spaces/events

- **Artists need affordable studio space, athletes need affordable practice spaces, etc** – currently very limited and often expensive to rent – even higher barrier to entry for communities who aren't used to getting involved – also you need to know where to look and who to talk to.

- **Encouraging more diverse use of spaces** in 'big' venues like the Music Hall, Art Gallery, Maritime Museum, Arts Centre, Sports Village, etc – pro-actively encouraging communities to use these spaces – help break down barriers and get people 'through the door.'

- **More flexibility in timing of events** – evening/weekend opening hours to allow working people to visit; afternoon events for young people; morning events targeted at older people, etc.

- **Wider opening hours for community centres** – needs council funding to pay for staff etc; some centres are much more active than others due to limits of volunteer staffing, etc.

- **Specific times catering for needs of target groups** – e.g. women-only swimming/gym sessions, cinema performances for family with special-needs kids, etc.

- **Building partnerships with communities** – e.g. Art Gallery setting aside a corner of an exhibit for community members to contribute their own art from different cultures, encouraging/supporting diverse artists to host (or co-host) events/exhibits/etc – will help attract people from those communities – also brings cultural diversity to the wider 'scene,' normalises diverse art, etc.

- **Wider range of sport/fitness activities for children and adults** – currently very limited access, especially in deprived areas; most focus is on football – more options will attract a wider range of people; sport tends to be very male-focused and money-focused; there needs to be activities for all genders, ages and ability levels; seems to be a problem across the UK, not just in Aberdeen.

Proactive outreach – better advertising of existing spaces, free events/exhibits, etc; advertising in different languages; organising 'taster' events for specific communities; more (financially) accessible events, etc.

- Some spaces/events are great with advertising and are very popular (Spectra) but others are less well known (Maritime Museum). Art Gallery is obviously there, but not obvious what's on offer.

- **Going into a space for the first time can be intimidating – even free spaces.**

- **Events to attract more diverse people:** open days, drop-ins, taster events, coffee mornings, tours in different languages, youth events, free or low-cost versions of events (advertised to target groups), child-friendly events, etc. This can be used for cultural venues, sports centres, community centres, etc. Providing free refreshments always helps.

- **Advertising through diverse channels** (online community forums, community magazines, Polish shops, churches, etc), **discount vouchers** for target groups, etc.

- **'Trails' to link different venues together,** give people an 'excuse' to go into places they haven't been before – 'passport' scheme, 'teddy bear trail,' etc – similar to the sculpture trails, which are very popular. Once they've gone in for a short time (to photograph teddy bear, etc) they're much more likely to go back.

Group 2

General

- To be a better place for all (like the LOIP says) – need to take **practical steps** to make Aberdeen one of the best cities to be in. Becoming a specialist/model of best practice around inclusion and accessibility – something to shout about/showcase that other cities would want to replicate.

- ACC is ambitious but they **overlook the cultural dynamics of the City and country**. We have New Scots from Syria and Afghanistan, along with many other migrant groups – a richness of cultural backgrounds. Also important to consider the different cultures and communities might value types of spaces differently. Something that can be ascertained through engagement and dialogue.

- The City and its spaces need to **change to reflect changing communities and demographics**, and awareness needs to be raised with communities about what is available.

- **Access Chain** – put together by Sensory Trust in England looking at accessibility of parks – some really useful issues are highlighted: sensorytrust.org.uk/resources/guidance/access-chain-an-inclusive-design-tool

- **Customer service is key** – staff training, making difference normal.

- **Public transport** needs major improvement – poor bus connections; expensive bus fares (much more than Edinburgh/Glasgow); constant changes of bus routes (people can lose confidence that they know the area; difficult for people with sight loss or limited English/literacy).

- **Comms and marketing**: people want to see themselves represented, information needs to be relatable. A lot of people lack confidence and self-esteem to engage with new things – it can be difficult to take the step to go in.

Cultural Spaces

- **Less inclusive:** historic/listed buildings unable to adapt for access requirements of people with mobility issues and wheelchairs; Music Hall needs better acoustics/lighting (despite recent refurbishment);

- **More inclusive:** ramp/lift in Music Hall; reception is easy to find; clear pathways; colour contrast.

- **Accessing information:** people should be able to access information/communication in formats they need (e.g. BSL, different languages, Braille, audio, etc)

- **Staff should be welcoming;** provide good customer service; be knowledgeable about disabilities (staff training) – need to understand people, not just provide a service.

- **People don't want to feel they make a fuss or are a burden!**

- **Cinemas mostly have English language films** – other languages would be good, subtitles, etc.

Outdoor & Community Spaces

- Concern that we're losing too much green space – we need to have some left for it to be welcoming etc.

- People from other cultural backgrounds might not value green space in the same way as people who have grown up in Aberdeen.

- Community centres need to be more open to the ethnic minority communities in their areas.

City Centre & Retail

- Buses should be taking people to key points.

- Restaurants and cafés setting up on the pavements/streets can be difficult for people moving around. Some of the pedestrianisation has been helpful, but the issue with buses is also important.

- Things like A-frames on pavements makes areas inaccessible.

- High rent for shops in the city centre; half the shops in Union Street are closed down.

- Poor bus connections to reach some shops/areas (Dobbies Garden Centre; Beach Boulevard; etc)

- Expensive parking; not enough parking in the city centre; not enough disabled parking.

Next Meeting: 25 November 2021