

Equalities Participation Network – February 24th 2022

Present: Myshele Haywood (GREC), Shola Ajide (Fountain of Love Church), Dave Black (GREC), Roslynn Fowler (Aberdeen Action on Disability), Carol Hannaford (sheltered housing), Libby Hillhouse (NESS), Zuzana Jatelova (Sunnybank Community Centre), Ross Mackay (GREC), Kathryn Masterson (Grampian Maternity Voices), Abdalla Mohammed (Aberdeen Mosque), Fay Morrison (community member, tenants' participation group), Faiza Nacef (ACC Equalities), Talatu Nandi (African Women's Group), Pearl Ochei (GREC social worker in training), Mary Rasmussen (Guide Dogs).

Apologies: Marion McLaughlin, Baldeep McGarry, Mateusz Lagoda.

Community Spotlight: Grampian Regional Equality Council (GREC)

Ross spoke about GREC, a charity that was established in 1984 as the 'Grampian Race Equality Council' – name was changed in 2011 to expand to cover all protected characteristics, though there's still a focus on race and ethnicity. There are three other regional equality councils in Scotland, based in Glasgow, Edinburgh and Falkirk.

GREC's services and projects:

- Support for individuals and families experiencing discrimination – casework (practical support, helping resolve issues, help with paperwork, etc), counselling (for adults or children and young people), help to report hate crime – all free.
- Support for New Scots (refugees).
- Learning space – work with schools, Anne Frank Awards (showcasing young people's anti-prejudice and anti-bullying work), training for outside organisations.
- Research and policy work – compiling and analysing statistics (for example, the How Fair is North East Scotland report, annual hate crime review), carrying out research for the NHS and other public bodies, developing research-based policy ideas.
- Community engagement – building relationships with different communities, helping connect people with relevant information on health and other issues, helping build digital skills, etc.
- Forums and networks – facilitating or participating in forums that bring together third sector and public sector partners around specific equality issues, like Integrate Grampian, the Interfaith Forum, the Shared Futures Group, No Recourse North East, etc.
- Language support – interpreting and translation service (In-Trans), language cafés (informal space to practice English and socialise), employability themed 'Language Works' cafés, and ESOL for Work classes.

Q&A

- **When and where are the language cafés?** In-person language cafés are in the Credo Centre, Thursdays 10:30am to noon, and 'Language Works' sessions are online, Tuesdays 7:30-8:30pm The most up-to-date information is on [facebook.com/LearnEnglishAberdeen](https://www.facebook.com/LearnEnglishAberdeen)

What's New?

Folk discussed equality issues have been on their mind over the past month, and who should be responsible for dealing with these issues:

- **Anti-trans misinformation in St Nicholas Sq** – still an issue. Unclear who should be responsible for dealing with this – both Police and ACC have said they can't do anything.
- **Issues with maternity services** – some people struggling to access interpreters and other language support; lack of diverse voices feeding into service improvement. Maternity group is engaging with NHS and HSCP to help deal with this, but needs more support.
- **Census** – Scottish Government census folk are contacting as many organisations as possible, to ensure participation from marginalised groups. Info will be circulated via EPN email list – please share widely. They also have budget for interpreters and other support, so if your community needs some help to participate, please get in touch with them.
- **Immigration issues/NRPF** – families with No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF), Home Office holding onto documents for months, folk not allowed to work becoming destitute. There has been some help from the ACC winter support fund, which people with NRPF can still access, for help with bills, food, etc. But it's a problem that's only getting worse, especially with **rising energy prices**. Also has knock-on effects on people's **mental health**.
- **Social isolation** – many folk who have been shielding during Covid-19 plan to continue, in order to stay safe – not so bad for those with families and activities that can be done online, but that's not the case for everyone. Folk with chronic health issues that haven't been to the doctor's in two years, just getting prescriptions renewed over the phone.
- **COVID testing for blind people** – Libby was going to look into this – any updates?
- **'Pop-up' Polish embassy** – good news – hosted last weekend at Tillydrone hub, 80 people accessed the service to deal with passport documents, register new babies born during Covid, etc. Some people travelled from Shetland! This kind of arrangement would be cost-saving long term, if the City could absorb the venue costs (Lithuanians also struggle to find accessible, affordable venues in Aberdeen).
- **Disability access to mainstream services** – struggling with coming to terms with deafness at secondary school; noisy classrooms, not getting required support; lip reading with masks is impossible.
- **Accessibility** – positive news – there has been an increase in the number of public bodies and local authorities who have been requesting advice from NESS on accessibility matters, how to make their services more accessible, and following on with definite actions.
- **Highway Code changes** (mentioned last meeting) – blind and visually impaired people have always been advised it's safest to wait for cars to pass at junctions, and guide dogs are trained to do this. With changes giving pedestrians priority, there is a potential safety issue. Libby to investigate the exact amendment of the highway code to fully understand the concern and let folk know at the next meeting.
- **Ukraine invasion** – there is a lot of concern within the Polish community, as they are closely related to Ukraine and have family and friends there. Concern about possible backlash against Russians in the UK, also possibility of factions supporting one side or the other. Folk in the breakout group were unaware of any Russian or Ukrainian communities in Aberdeen, but it may be necessary to put out feelers and keep an eye on any tension.

Equality Outcomes Action Plan – Introduction

The Action Plan was not ready to circulate before this meeting, so Faiza provided a brief introduction, with a plan to discuss more fully at the next meeting, so folk have time to read and digest the document.

- EPN was set up (partly) as a platform for Aberdeen City Council (ACC) to engage with communities on developing and fulfilling the Equality Outcomes.
 - The Action Plan is set of specific things the Council is doing (with partners) to deliver on the Equality Outcomes. These are the three Equality Outcomes:
 - 1) All people with protected characteristics will **access information, goods and services** knowing that **social and physical barriers are identified and removed**.
 - 2) Diverse communities in Aberdeen will have an **increased sense of safety and belonging** within their neighbourhood and city.
 - 3) **Civic participation** of people with protected characteristics will be improved by ensuring our **leaders, staff and organisation champion the equality agenda** in the city.
 - Both the Outcomes and the Action Plan are based on gathering a lot of evidence and suggestions from communities. The Action Plan is not set in stone at the moment, ACC wants to know if there are ways to make it better.
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Aberdeen City Voice

Dave Black is working on an Improvement Project to increase participation and representation of diverse communities on the Aberdeen City Voice panel.

- Dave explained that Aberdeen City Voice is a panel of Aberdeen residents who give their views on a range of issues, in two online surveys per year. There are around 1000 people involved, but many people don't fill in the surveys.
- Myshele and Pearl are both on the panel, but admitted they often don't complete the survey. This is because it's fairly long and involved, and there's only one or two emails about it – by the time they get around to doing it, it's too late!
- Folk discussed several questions in breakout groups:
 - 1) What do you think of the idea of City Voice? Were you aware of it before?
 - 2) How does the method of online surveys compare with other methods of giving a voice to communities?
 - 3) We have many people on the panel who don't respond to the surveys. What do you think would make them more likely to respond?
 - 4) Any other thoughts on City Voice specifically, or more generally how your community can be given a stronger voice in Aberdeen?

Some (not all) responses:

General comments and questions:

- People in the breakout group had not heard of City Voice – where is it being advertised?

- How do you determine if the questionnaires are completed by a diverse group of people? (*note: when people sign up, there is a form asking about different characteristics*) Are specific groups being targeted? How?
- Not everyone has a smartphone or computer, not everyone can type or interact with a typical online survey – are there other ways to participate?
- Are other languages available?
- Are children and young people invited to participate?

Comments on existing City Voice process:

- There is no attempt to engage the panellist, no sense of ownership is built – so the questionnaires are not high priority for many people.
- Emails containing the link for the questionnaire are very bland, not very appealing or eye-catching. Maybe too much council speak which does not necessarily resonate with how people view the city?
- The questionnaire can be long and cover a lot of random topics, some of which are irrelevant or boring – this can put folk off the whole thing.
- Several months between surveys means people forget about them, then it seems like a big deal when the email comes in, which can lead to procrastination.

Suggestions:

- Direct contact with community groups to introduce City Voice, the need for their input and get their representation to complete the questionnaires. This way, it is more balanced.
- Use of more accessible digital platforms like WhatsApp, rather than email and paperwork. A WhatsApp group will be better received and easier to engage and complete the questionnaire.
- Reduce the length of the questionnaire or break into segments where people can choose what they are interested.
- Include engaging content to build ownership, maybe one-off virtual meetings.
- Shorter, more frequent surveys will give people more opportunities to engage, and get a higher response rate for at least some of the questions. Monthly would be a good target, with 5-7 minutes to complete.
- Tick box questions are easier and quicker to answer – if there need to be text boxes, leave them until the end where people can write things if they choose – if not, at least they've done the tick-box part.
- Themed surveys (rather than a lot of unrelated topics) will encourage people to answer questions on topics that interest them. This in itself will also help identify what issues people are most concerned about.
- Consider doing surveys (or recruiting people) in-person, for example going to a shopping centre during a busy weekend, or community events.
- Consider providing translated versions of surveys to allow participation from communities who struggle with English.

- Incentives can improve response rate – prize draw, vouchers, etc. YouGov uses ‘points’ that people can redeem in prize draws, extra points for referring a friend, etc. Maybe money off your council tax??
 - Social media – can participants share on social media when they’ve taken part? That would help get their friends and contacts involved, and provide another small incentive.
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Next Meeting: Thursday, 24 March 2022, 5:00-6:30 on Zoom

- **ACC Equality Outcomes Action Plan** – discussion of the plan, how EPN members can get involved, Q&A, etc. The community spotlight will be on Cyrenians.
- **Please note this is a week earlier than usual.** GREC are hosting an online workshop with tips for writing successful funding applications, which EPN members are welcome to attend (details to be circulated). The workshop will be **Wednesday 30th March**, which is the day before our usual meeting date, so members preferred to have the meeting a week earlier.