

## Equalities Participation Network – March 24<sup>th</sup> 2022

**Present:** Myshele Haywood (GREC), Roslynn Fowler (Aberdeen Action on Disability), Carol Hannaford (sheltered housing), Zuzana Jatelova (Sunnybank Community Centre), Daniel Meinel (Cyrenians), Fay Morrison (community member, tenants' participation group), Faiza Nacef (ACC Equalities), Pearl Ochei (GREC social worker in training), Mary Rasmussen (Guide Dogs), Christa Reid (DEP and other groups).

**Apologies:** Fiona Rennie, Libby Hillhouse, Abdalla Mohammed, Mateusz Lagoda.

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### Community Spotlight: Aberdeen Cyrenians

[weareac.org](http://weareac.org)

Daniel spoke about Aberdeen Cyrenians, a charity that provides practical and emotional support for vulnerable people, based in Summer Street.

#### Aberdeen Cyrenians' services and projects:

- Direct Access 'open door' service is open to anyone facing crisis in their lives, providing information, advice, food, clothing, toiletries, access to showers, laundrette facilities, computers and printers, mailboxes for those with no fixed address, and veterinary care for pets.
- Also: counselling; support groups; help to access housing; homelessness prevention; employability and digital skills support; residential and respite care; home-based support; re-integration after prison release; advocacy; assistance with applications and appeals; trauma informed care and support; signposting to other agencies.
- Specific services supporting people experiencing homelessness, domestic violence, mental health issues, sexual abuse or exploitation (including in the past), substance misuse, involvement with the justice system, and other issues.
- The referral process is as simple and straightforward as possible, to avoid excluding anyone from accessing the services.

#### Daniel's work:

- Daniel works on the EVAA project – Ending Violence and Abuse Aberdeen – specifically on the inclusive service, helping LGBT+ and ethnic minority people experiencing domestic abuse from their partners or families, or who fear coming out to their families because of potential violence.
- Cyrenians takes a client-led, holistic approach – “I can't provide emotional support if someone doesn't have their basic needs met.” Also works in partnership with other organisations including Migrant Help, GREC, SACRO, Stonewall Scotland, and others.
- Key issues include: human trafficking; transgender immigrants who can't return to their home countries; waiting for a long time to receive basics like furniture; lack of LGBT+ inclusive social activities, especially for older men ((anything else I missed?))
- Many service users feel neglected by housing officers and other support workers – other services are swamped and struggle to meet people's needs. Even relatively minor bureaucratic issues can have profound impacts on people's lives.

## Bonus Spotlight: Somebody Cares

[somebodycaresscotland.org](http://somebodycaresscotland.org)

Christa volunteers with Somebody Cares, and shared information about what they offer:

- Huge warehouse with donated clothing, furniture, home goods, children's toys, baby equipment, etc – Health & Social Care Partnership folk come with clients to get what they need (self-referral not possible – **Christa to check if charities can refer, or if it's only through social workers**). Greenwell Road, Altens.
  - Monthly sale – Hazlehead 'Megastore' is open to the public, the first Saturday of every month, 10am to noon, with a large selection of items for sale at a low cost. £1 entry fee. Pavillion 5, Craighshaw Drive. More information here: [facebook.com/SomebodyCaresRetail](https://facebook.com/SomebodyCaresRetail)
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## 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:

- **Heating price rises** – especially for people without English as their first language. Support is available but many won't know how to access it. Vouchers for pre-pay meters are available at post offices and paypoints, through SCARF.
- **Bus passes / other benefits** – application for young people's free bus card is extremely complicated, so people are missing out on their entitlements. The same is true for disabled people's bus card / companion card – the required evidence must be provided by consultants or specialists, not GPs, despite ongoing waiting lists. Many people opt to do without, rather than wasting a consultant's time. More broadly, there are millions of pounds of entitlements not being claimed because people are unaware, or unable to do the paperwork. Other discussion around strange rules (PIP recipients still need to pay Council Tax, etc).
- The ACC Financial Inclusion Team produces a **Benefits Bulletin** with lots of relevant information – **Myshale to circulate to EPN list with notes**.
- **Taxi issues – 'Enforcement Officer'** – for years, taxi drivers have waited in supermarket car parks (in regular spaces) for their passengers with mobility issues to shop, then have met them at the entrance, helped with their bags, etc. Recently, there have been repeated complaints of a new 'ACC enforcement officer' by Sainsbury's in Berryden, sending threatening emails to drivers over the length of time they're parked, saying they're not fit to be taxi drivers and that their license could be revoked. There have been no attempts to speak with drivers or consider context.

The disabled community around Berryden are upset with this development, which erodes the helpful relationships built with taxi drivers over time. What is this new role? And are these actions authorised? Previously the rule has been that **two** officers approach taxis that are parked longer than allowed, speak to the driver, and take a photo before a formal warning is issued. The new process sounds suspicious and potentially dangerous. The issue has been brought up with local councillors. **Faiza to investigate and report back**.

- **Taxi issues – more broadly** – people from three different groups noted complaints from their communities that many taxi drivers have stopped providing supportive services for

people who are physically challenged – for example, assisting a visually impaired person in and out of the taxi, or helping an older person put their shopping in the boot if they're struggling. Covid-19 has been an umbrella excuse given for refusing to give assistance. ACC reduction of taxi ranks in the city centre is also still a concern. **Faiza to enquire from ACC licencing board how they are meeting their own equality outcomes. Are they engaging with communities? Are they are aware of these issues?**

#### **Follow-up on issues from recent meetings:**

- Libby looked into **Covid testing for blind people**, but there was not much information or help available. Portlethen is the only site in Aberdeen where someone can have a lateral flow test done. Through the app **BeMyEyes**, volunteers can support people remotely (e.g. reading the result), but that still leaves the fiddly work of actually doing the test – especially now that LFTs have gone back to the original system where users have to empty capsules of liquid into test tubes.

Most of the people that NESS supports have found a way of dealing with it – while there will be some who really struggle, many folk don't want to make a fuss and have unnecessary attention. RNIB has not raised it as an issue, and the NESS fieldwork staff have not heard about it, despite working with people throughout the pandemic.

- Libby also looked into the **new traffic rules**, which are causing confusion among visually impaired people, who have previously waved cars on, in order to cross roads safely (and guide dogs are trained not to cross in front of stopped traffic without a formal crossing). She hasn't found any information about how this is resolved or if there is any campaign to raise awareness or redress this issue, but she thinks that Guide Dogs (the organisation) are likely to do some work on it, if anything can be done. If she finds out anything further, she will let us know – until then, all we can do locally is be aware of it, and aware of any updates/changes and be able to share them if/when required.

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#### **Equality Outcomes Action Plan**

The Action Plan was circulated to the email list a couple of weeks ago, and Faiza made a brief presentation about the plan (both attached). Attendees then split into two groups to discuss:

**Equality Outcome 1:** All people with protected characteristics will **access information, goods and services** knowing that **social and physical barriers are identified and removed**.

- Regardless of coordinated support and promotion, there will always be some people who cannot do things digitally due to age, mental or physical ability. Could there be dedicated support for this people group across services? For example, Sky have a dedicated line to accommodate this.

Faiza noted that this is raised all the time during equality assessments – we should keep raising it, so ACC is continually hearing about the challenges with digital access. Lucy Mackenzie from ACC customer service attended an EPN meeting in May, with follow-up emails in June and November – will need to revisit this.

- There was assistance for digitally challenged people to complete census information, and many missed the March 20<sup>th</sup> deadline. For some reason, the codes originally sent out could not be used for late responses (they needed to get new codes) – so it was a good thing they had assistance. It will be very confusing for those without support.
- There was a campaign to get a controlled crossing at Upperkirkgate over two years ago. Councillors were asked to cross the road blindfolded to understand the experience of visually impaired people. They agreed that the crossing was needed but it was put on hold for 6 month period as led by Councillor John Wheeler. What is happening with this? **Faiza to follow up and update.**
- There are still concerns about the absence of accessible independent voting for visually impaired people. RNIB are campaigning for this. We would like to see tactile lettering of record voting information so it can be used independently and slotted into the ballot box. Braille is great but not all visually impaired people know how to use braille. **Faiza to investigate and feedback.**
- Faiza noted it would be great if organisations respond to and promote Action 11: **“Consider funding (through Fairer Aberdeen fund) for more practical, inclusive community projects that bring people together in a safe, family-friendly space and build relationships.”**

**Equality Outcome 2:** Diverse communities in Aberdeen will have an **increased sense of safety and belonging** within their neighbourhood and city.

- It’s difficult to get an interpreter for reporting hate crime. Suggestion of more effort towards recruiting diverse people into the Police, as they do at Pride week for the LGBT+ community.
- Training for ACC officers and elected members is not enough – need to work with communities and the wider public (also suggestion of more training for police officers, as they can be dismissive about hate crime). Also: who is doing the training? What will be included?
- For all types of training, personal stories are key, make the issue more meaningful, showing the day-in, day-out experience of ‘low level’ hate crime. Suggestion of safe space for people to share their stories (open evening, human library, etc).
- “Common sense is not enough” – everyone knows hate crime is bad – need to identify the disconnect.
- Action #4 – does ‘in kind support’ include providing space for events, etc? If so, this would make a huge difference. Needs to be promoted proactively.
- On events more broadly – there seems to be an aspiration for lots of big events like Pride or the Mela, which demand a huge amount of work, funding, etc. Suggestion to start small and build up – promote small scale community events like coffee mornings or food sharing in a block of flats, etc. Things take time to develop momentum. Community centres are an under-used resource here. Food always brings people together.

**Equality Outcome 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.

- Didn't have much time to discuss this, but overall it's hard to get anyone – from any background – to engage or commit to civic activities. This is why it tends to be dominated by people from certain backgrounds, who have time/money/headspace.
- Seems very one-sided, trying to get communities to engage with existing structures in specific ways – fair enough for things like voting in elections, but beyond that it's important to ask communities what kinds of things they want to engage with – it might not exist yet. What would participation look like for them? If they had time for volunteering or joining a group, what kinds of things would they want to do? Some people may want to be part of existing groups (community councils, etc) – but inclusion also means ensuring there are other appealing kinds of things to get involved with.
- (Copied from discussion group 1 above) There are still concerns about the absence of accessible independent voting for visually impaired people. RNIB are campaigning for this. We would like to see tactile lettering of record voting information so it can be used independently and slotted into the ballot box. Braille is great but not all visually impaired people know how to use braille. Faiza to investigate and feedback.

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### **Aberdeen Archives, Gallery & Museums (AAGM) – ‘Responding to Object Labels’**

Karen Jamieson told the group about her project to gather in-depth feedback about the way things are labelled in the Art Gallery and other public collections, with a focus on Slavery and Colonialism, and Representations of People of Colour.

This is what she wrote in an email:

Having a public discussion is a vital part of making our shared arts and heritage more inclusive and representative of the 21st Century audience and we are inviting members of our communities to take part in relaxed and informal workshops, to consider new interpretations of a selection of objects from our collections.

The responses generated in each workshop will differ, depending on the individuals taking part. These responses may take the form of discussion, creative writing, poetic annotation, audio interpretation or even artworks. We would like to display some of these responses, along with the objects, in Aberdeen Art Gallery and all responses will be added to our official museum database alongside the catalogued object.

The workshops will take place in the comfortable environment of the Aberdeen Art Gallery learning space and run by our friendly and experienced staff and partners. The aims of this project are to:

- Encourage the public to be involved in the conversation and interpretation of AAGM collections
- Share hidden histories and give voice to a more diverse audience
- Engage with audiences and allow them to express their interpretation of the collection
- Share and discovering histories of the objects
- Increase creative interpretations of objects in the collection

For more information, or to organise taking part in a workshop, please contact Karen directly:  
[KarJamieson@aberdeencity.gov.uk](mailto:KarJamieson@aberdeencity.gov.uk)

The website for Aberdeen Archives, Gallery and Museums is: [aberdeencity.gov.uk/AAGM](http://aberdeencity.gov.uk/AAGM)

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**Next Meeting: Thursday 21 April 2022, 5:00-6:30 on Zoom**

- Someone from the Police will be joining us to talk about hate crime, and to ask for your thoughts on how to improve the process for reporting hate crimes in your community. Spotlight TBC.
- In May, Carol Hannaford will be talking about changes to housing in Aberdeen, along with her colleague Rachel Harrison, a Locality Inclusion Manager. Spotlight TBC.