

Equalities Participation Network – November 3rd 2022

Present: Molly McCall (GREC), Shola Ajide (Fountain of Love), Darren Buck (ACC), Ru Carrol (Four Pillars), Roslynn Fowler (Aberdeen Action on Disability), Carol Hannaford (ACC), Libby Hillhouse (North East Sensory Services), Zuzana Jatelova (Aberdeenshire Council), Baldeep McGarry (ACC Equalities), Daniel Meinel (Cyrenians), Maria Jose Pavez (GREC), Bertha Yakubu (African Women's Group)

What's New?

- Zuzi has recently left ACC and is now working with Aberdeenshire Council. Congratulations on the new role!
- Four Pillars have organised a series of “festive feasts” in Aberdeen City & Shire over the festive season. These subsidized dinners are free to attend, but places are limited so registration is required. Eventbrite pages for these events are live but still to be promoted.
- Fountain of Love have a talk on cardiovascular health for African men coming up on 26th November. They are also running a team building session for their growing volunteer list the same day. The FoL Christmas concert is also coming up soon on the 3rd December and is open to all.
- African Womens Group ran a kids club over the October holidays which was a success; and also recently held an event with an immigration/family solicitor where community members were able to ask questions/get advice- events like this would help combat the lack of immigration services locally. AWGS also have a Christmas party coming up on 26th November.
- ACC have collaborated with Aberdeen Foyer and other partners to launch a new housing network for young people in Aberdeen, which met for the first time on Wednesday 9th Nov. The network was created in response to a recent housing survey among local young people which received almost 600 responses!
- People underestimate or don't really understand issues around accessibility. People understand ramps and physical accessibility but not around our service users who are blind and/or deaf. That is an ongoing frustration. Cost of living and winter is also a current concern for everybody, a key issue. What is happened politically is also concerning as well.
- Main issues are inflation, bills, food and not knowing where to go or how to sort things out. We have missed a whole section in society, and they have completely forgotten about pensioners. Only small pots of money are being considered and are not reaching everybody. When you get phone calls and you are a disability charity that is the first question, where do we go and who is going to help us. And many people are stubborn and refuse to go to food banks.
- -Something alternative for food banks is cafes, that's what I've been suggestions to service users. This seems to be a new service late at night, depending on what is left in restaurants or cafes, they have doggy bags available.

- It would be useful to have this information (food banks and alternatives) available in one place. We have this just now available from ACC:
<https://www.aberdeency.gov.uk/services/benefits-and-advice/get-benefits-and-money-advice> To be added: <https://toogoodtogo.co.uk/en-gb/>
 - Supporting people that are going through an application with the Home Office, processes are taking a long time, over a year now (one asylum seeker, and another on a dependant visa separated due to domestic abuse). People have very limited support, especially asylum seekers. Questions about the situation of people seeking asylum were raised.
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Spotlight: GREC's Policy and Research Work

- Maria Jose gave a short presentation on GREC's policy and research work and the progress she has made since starting this work a year ago, and provided an overview of the Systemic Discrimination discussion paper that was circulated in advance of the meeting.
 - While discussing the paper, the importance of setting a clear objective for our research was raised. In the case of systemic discrimination for example, there is already a vast evidence base showing it is a real and pervasive issue- so practical solutions to alleviate these problems are more important than gathering evidence they exist.
 - One objective is to center community voices in policy development, so feedback at EPN meetings and the like is valuable. We also share our findings with public sector organisations and policy makers in order to hopefully influence good policy and practice at these institutions.
 - It was noted that the response from these institutions, their willingness to engage and implement practical changes will be key to the success of policy and research work. Practical change must follow policy change for it to be meaningful.
 - Shola provided the lack of suitable employment opportunities for highly educated and qualified ethnic minorities, especially Africans, as an example of systemic discrimination he sees often. He has known community members resort to "whitewashing" their CVs in order to have more success in job applications.
 - We discussed diversity in ACC's workforce and Baldeep shared the relevant equalities data. While the workforce broadly is quite diverse, minority representation is lacking among the council leadership at highest levels suggesting barriers to progression for minority employees.
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Speaker: Darren Buck, ACC

- Darren and his colleagues have been working to improve recruitment and employment practices at Aberdeen City Council. Darren recently moved to a new Organisational Development role, but continues to work on these areas.

- They have received plenty of feedback from council employees but are lacking voices from outside of the Council (including previous and potential future applicants).
 - Attending EPN meetings is a way for Darren to gather feedback from communities, but he is also keen to visit community spaces directly.
 - The new ACC Workforce Strategy is currently in development, and would benefit from community feedback.
 - Darren acknowledged the issue noted above of lack of minorities in leadership roles and lack of progression opportunities for minorities- this is something ACC are actively working to change through new accelerator programmes for members of underrepresented groups to learn skills for CO/executive roles.
 - Coaching/mentoring, CPD budgets should be a priority to allow better progression for minority council employees.
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AOB

- The recent Third Party Reporting Centre training session GREC ran with Police Scotland was discussed. Roslynn found it beneficial but queried why there has been no followup yet.
 - We discussed promoting the EPN. The ACC Tenants Newsletter goes out to 22,000 people, so it would be a good place for an article about the network. ACVO newsletter also has a large readership.
 - There are still some volunteering opportunities available at Fountain of Love- contact Shola for more information.
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Date of next meeting: Thursday 24 November, 5:00-6:30pm