

Equalities Participation Network – 25 May 2023

Present: Myshele Haywood (GREC), Timi Adegunwa (Black and Scot), Shola Ajide (Fountain of Love), Ru Carroll (Four Pillars), Roslynn Fowler (Aberdeen Action on Disability), Carol Hannaford (Sheltered Housing), Linzi Harrow (ACC Equalities), Zuzana Jatelova (Aberdeenshire Council), Baldeep McGarry (ACC Equalities), Fay Morrison (various community groups), Mary Rasmussen (Guide Dogs).

Format and Timing of Meetings

Member feedback

In March/April this year, Myshele circulated questions to EPN members about how things were going with the group, and whether anything could be done better. 11 people responded.

Summary of responses

- **For those who haven't been to meetings recently, has there been a reason why?**
Lack of capacity/time (4), no longer in the role (1), timing unsuitable (1).
- **Is the frequency of meetings suitable? (monthly)**
All responded positively or didn't mention this.
- **Is the regular meeting time suitable? (5:00-6:30pm, last Thursday of the month)**
Yes or didn't mention (6), Clashes with other commitments (5)
 - Earlier in the day would be better (4)
 - Later in the day would be better (1)
- **Are online sessions suitable, or would you prefer in-person or hybrid meetings?**
Didn't mention (3), Happy with online (5), Prefer in-person (1), Prefer in-person but happy to go with whatever works best for others (2). **Specific reasons:**
 - Online: accessibility; less time commitment; breakout rooms make it easier to discuss things with a small number of people, rather than needing to speak in front of the whole group.
 - In-person: miss the chance to see people face-to-face.
- **Suggestions for doing things better:**
 - Calendar invites will be helpful for people who use electronic calendars.
 - Timing during standard working day will be helpful for those whose community role is their 'day job.'
 - Advertising campaign to attract new members and bring new voices to the discussion.
 - For topics where the presenter has spoken to other groups, it's likely that some EPN members have already heard their points – so it would be useful if they considered their topic specifically from an equalities perspective when speaking to EPN.

- Space for news from the ACC equalities team and member organisations, rather than just asking about negative issues.
- Encourage more partnership working between member groups.
- **Other notable points:**
 - 4 people mentioned that they appreciate the networking aspect of EPN.

Further Discussion

Meeting time: Myshele suggested future meetings be the **last Thursday of the month, 4:00-5:00pm**, with a tighter focus (one speaker rather than several, for example). Everyone was happy with this, and agreed that it might be more accessible for others. One person suggested changing the day, but general consensus was that Thursdays are ok, and there will never be a day or time that works for absolutely everyone.

Hybrid meetings: there were some concerns around technical issues, especially sound and video quality for the in-person part of the meeting (e.g. not being able to see everyone's face or hear them properly). Some people expressed that they would be unable to join the in-person part of a hybrid meeting, due to other commitments just before or just after, or difficulty travelling to the city centre. One person said they were 'hybrid meetinged out.' However, there was interest in trying a hybrid meeting after the summer, using a space in the Town House or Marischal College.

Topics: Overall everyone was happy with the mix of topics we've been covering, with a few additional suggestions:

- 'Spotlight' sessions for council services to explain what they do and how to access them.
- Inviting speakers from council tax department, NHS, education, and youth work.
- Other organisations could also be invited – e.g. Barnardos, the Foyer, etc.
- Specific question of new services being delivered through pharmacies – how does this work?

What's New? (equality issues in members' communities)

'Ghost Children' – a high number of young people (13-17) are simply not attending school, for a variety of reasons – unmet support needs (disability, language, mental health, etc), difficulty re-adjusting after Covid-19, social exclusion or bullying, migrant children being assigned to schools far from their accommodation or not getting a school place at all, etc.

- Several EPN members noted this issue affecting their communities – engagement with school has always been a struggle for some young people, but it seems much worse now.
- One person noted difficulties in getting diagnoses – often support is only available if a diagnosis is presented – and even then, it depends on available resources at the school.
- It was also noted that teachers have less training in additional support needs than they used to, and there is a shortage of Pupil Support Assistants, which can make the classroom environment very difficult for young people who need additional support.
- Other contributing issues are a lack of 'alternative' practical and vocational subjects, and cultural awareness training for teachers.

- Overall, schools do not seem to be enforcing attendance policies, or even checking whether pupils are ok – especially for disabled and ethnic minority young people.
- The issue was raised in relation to a 14-year-old family member of an EPN member – **Zuzana** to pass details to the youth work team in Aberdeenshire, where the family is based.
- **Linzi** to look into what support is available in Aberdeen City, and see if she can identify the extent of the problem. Do schools keep records of this?
- **Ru** to ask about the issue at a meeting with **Barnardo's** next week, and another with **Autism Understanding Scotland**, who have resources for families of autistic children and young people, support groups, an advice service, etc.

Restrictions on family visas for international students – the news has caused 'disarray' in ethnic minority communities, especially among international students who came to the UK with the intention of bringing their partner and/or children once they were established. Those who currently have family members with them are afraid their partners and/or children will be forced to leave.

- It was noted that the Scottish Government are much more supportive of ethnic minority communities, and they do not support this policy – but they have no control over immigration.
- **Myshela** to find and circulate a petition against the policy.

Telephone access to ACC services – Roslynn noted that AAD clients are struggling to get through to council services by phone, especially in terms of long waiting times (and physically holding up the phone for extended periods). Carol explained a new system at the ACC call centre, where a person can leave their number and receive a call back without losing their place in the queue. This should help, but may be tricky for people who need help with their query from caseworkers at AAD, GREC, etc.

Date of next meeting: Thursday 29 June, 4:00-5:00pm (please note new time!)

Topic: TBC