

Working Towards a Collaborative Culture: Key Messages from the event

29th April 2015

Scottish Government, Victoria Quay, Edinburgh

Introduction

Co-produced by The Scottish Government Third Sector Unit, ACOSVO, Children in Scotland and Voluntary Health Scotland, the purpose of this event was to connect leaders across the sectors, facilitate dialogue and explore some of the myths of each other's sectors.

The ambition of this dialogue was to build relationships, and contribute to the continued understanding, development and implementation of policy in relevant areas, including:

- Assets-Based Approaches
- Collaborative Learning Environments and Cultures
- Workforce Empowerment

Welcome

The morning was introduced, using Equal Partners, the collaboration between Children in Scotland, ACOSVO, Voluntary Health Scotland and the Scottish Government, as an exemplar of collaborative, assets based working. Gareth Allen, Third Sector Unit at Scottish Government, and Pat Armstrong, Chief Executive at ACOSVO led the introduction. Gareth highlighted the Programme for Government, which includes social justice, democratic renewal, community empowerment and engagement, and economic growth. Co-production and collaboration have to underpin all of this, and that requires a willingness to engage and understand other people's values and assets, and to build enabling and empowering relationships with others. Pat pointed out that collaboration can be harder and slower ("we make plans and the gods laugh") but outcomes can be richer and more impactful.

The timeline below was used to highlight the collaborative working achieved by Equal Partners:



Nick Wilding, Skilled Workers Skilled Citizens

Nick Wilding gave a platform to a number of colleagues he has worked with who have used collaborative approaches to make changes.

First, Donna Burnett, from NHS Health Scotland spoke about workforce skills and development. Health Scotland had looked at workforce development in the context of public sector reform. They held a 'National Colloquium' which came up with suggestions on what needed to happen differently and how best to establish a needs based approach. Former Chief Medical Officer Harry Burns spoke to the group and provided a real 'lightbulb' moment in understanding and valuing an assets based approach. This then led the group on to service redesign in accordance to what people actually want. The key to the process was looking at the whole approach. It was about people coming together looking at what works and being much more outward facing and engaging.

Next, Ailie MacPherson discussed the work of East Ayrshire Council and the Vibrant Communities project which was a response to the Christie Commission report. The Council wanted not just to talk about Christie but to embody it - bring departments together to work collaboratively. They recognised that they needed to work within communities to support community led action plans. Currently looking to have 30 plans in place by 2017. Working with the community has met with a very positive response from people and groups in the community. Each community has a connector- a go to person. The key is about changing culture and not just changing processes. This had been at heart of the work. Creating a 'human connection' is important. Since starting Vibrant Communities there has been a huge boost in volunteering numbers and East Ayrshire Council allows each member of staff a paid day to do voluntary work. This is a great example of changing culture and making a practice that works more viable.

More information about the project: <https://vimeo.com/74110464>

Cathy Sharp introduced My Home Life <http://myhomelife.org.uk/> as an example of culture change in a single sector using UK wide leadership development programme alongside community development. It involves working with care home managers over a year using action learning as continuous process of enquiry. Community development standards look at how to bring wider system change. Learning is a process in itself. Led by Professor Belinda Dewar they used appreciative enquiry approach to discover what is happening in a particular home, questioning 'what is working well?' They really focused on finding the good and looked at how to make it even better.

Caring conversations were used- more information here:
<http://myhomelife.uws.ac.uk/scotland/caring-conversations/>

Janet Whitley introduced Memorable Moments with skilled workers skilled citizens- looking at human connections and hearing each other's stories. This was essentially about listening and hearing from the first hand stories to bring this to life. This was also about realising that there is a lot to learn to from collaboration. They wanted to create the opportunities for people to hear. This feels new and fresh but there is the temptation to try and systematise this process which would stop it being effective. Janet wanted to highlight the need to genuinely listen to communities.

Group Discussion session A

Table discussions then considered the question: **How can we harness the assets within our organisations?**



Themes that emerged were:

Organisational and structural issues:

- Too much emphasis on getting structures right
- Too busy doing day job
- Uniform approach across departments and sectors not happening
- Competition versus sharing
- Risk averse

Leadership and language issues:

- Many organisations don't think, use or speak of assets
- Need to view as an investment (not a luxury) that will pay dividends
- Language of asset based approach not usual for many
- Need plain and shared language around assets
- Need time, understanding and vision

Building trust and confidence in the approach

- People are the greatest assets
- Need to think of 'hearts, hands and minds' approach
- Need to create relationships of trust
- Need to learn to say what we do well and have confidence in our abilities
- Diversity in each person can play to the strengths of a team

Exemplars of what works:

- Early years collaborative ethos broke down barriers of working across sectors
- Accessing skills we don't always recognise as relevant
- Celebrating failure and examining success
- Bringing more of yourself to your work
- Remembering assets are collective - assets of a team

Questions raised were:

- Are asset based approaches actually valued?
- Is structural change effecting real change for people: are they healthier, happier, safer?
- How do we engender faith, belief and commitment to change – will it really make a difference?
- Who are we beyond our job description? Can we bring our assets to the table?
- Are we a risk adverse culture?

Group Discussion Session B

After a plenary feedback session, table discussion address the question: **How can we foster collaboration across sectors?**



Themes that emerged were:

Trust and empower your people:

- Need freedom to explore and freedom to innovate
- Trust people to know what they are doing
- Collective voice - there are strength in numbers
- Be more proactive at building relationships
- Strong expertise is needed to reach more people experiencing inequalities

Walk the talk:

- Shared long term vision and ethos- need to create together
- Create the space in your organisation to enable change
- Look at your own organisation as you look at others
- Really important to be clear on where the collaborative advantage is
- Quality tools to deliver effective collaboration

Join things up:

- Connect bigger organisations to smaller ones

- Reduce silo mentality
- Collaboration takes time and investment in relationships
- Cost saving through co-producing
- Understand the risks involved

Address those sticky issues:

- Culture is often ingrained - difficult to make a shift
- Funders need to understand impact of continuous applications
- The procurement process - accountability
- Evidence based decision v emotional based politics
- Elephant in the room is competition versus collaboration

Key questions that emerged from the groups were:

- Who takes the credit - who contributed to final outcome?
- Motivation of other organisations may be different- how do you work this way?
- Accountability of a partner- what happens when let down?
- How can there be true partnership when one can pull the plug on the other?
- Evaluation- how do you evaluate collaborate approaches?
- Is collaboration possible when some are protecting own interests?
- Can we create 'Asset Angels'- like business mentors- could it be a cross sectorial approach?



Jayne Stuart, WEA Scotland

Jayne Stuart, WEA Scotland gave an insight in to their project to work together as a team to co-design and co-produce an event to enable participants raise awareness and understand the Community Learning and Development Strategic Regulations and Guidance. Her presentation was a comprehensive overview of working collaboratively and the steps involved. The key concepts used during the project working were: debate and dialogue, storytelling, drama and performance. The stages involved planning and designing together, producing together and reviewing together. Through the process there was the need to examine the vehicles for engagement of stakeholders. Jayne gave a comprehensive overview of the collaborative process, practice and the outcomes. Her personal reflections on this approach were:

- Really creative approach for the subject areas
- Engaged a wider if not larger audience
- Messy
- Couple of critical moments
- Facilitation is essential

Authentic Leadership Live Challenge

Attendees were given an 'Authentic Leadership' live challenge. This involved having one person as the problem holder, another is the facilitator and all others were to ask three questions to explore the issue further. This was an effective process used to examine how we view and solve problems with an outside influence.

Conclusions of the day

Stuart Cable, from NHS Education Scotland and Claire Stevens from Voluntary Health Scotland gave the closing remarks to the day. Stuart asked us to remember in the true nature of being inclusive, that some people are very uncomfortable with collaborative working- it needs to be set in the right time and right place. He summed up with 4 things we established from the day:

1. We need a clear narrative on our purpose- to know where we are going and why
2. We have a strong need for creativity
3. We need commitment to sharing
4. We need to be realistic and focus on the end impact

But he reminded us that this all needed to translate this to our own organisations objectives. Using the NAVVY term to think about what we do:

Needs - whose needs are being met?

Abilities - Right capabilities

Voices - whose voices are heard

Value - who or what is valued – is something overvalued?

You - how are you feeling?

Claire asked everyone to think about the next steps. Where can we go collectively? Once the notes and information from this meeting are circulated can we all take actions on where we go? Could there be more equal partnership collaborations? Could there be simple steps such as the staff exchange meeting to learn from each other? Could we establish an 'Asset Angel' system? The Equal Partners group would be very interested in hearing your ideas for collaborative working.

21st May 2015

For further information about the event, next steps or Equal Partners, contact:

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