

Equality Counting Case Studies

Background and aims of project

'Equality Counting' at Engender was funded by the UK Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) to promote the effective implementation of the equalities duties by establishing opportunities for dialogue between public service providers and women using their services. The project worked with women to:

- Organise as communities of interest around a shared concern
- Research the impact of policy and practice on this issue from a gendered equality perspective
- Articulate the lived experience of this impact in ways that help them engage with the relevant public service provider(s) to achieve the desired change

We have produced case studies describing the work of the three communities of interest (c-o-i) who have been involved in 'Equality Counting' in 2010:

1. Women Thinking Trans Issues (WTTI)
2. Women Thinking Disability
3. Women Thinking Inclusive Communication (Women TIC)

Each case study will outline the processes, expectations and outcomes for the different groups. There will also be some discussion of roles adopted and impacts on some of the individual members.

Introduction to the c-o-is

WTTI

At the end of January 2010 an email went out through the Scottish Transgender Alliance network targeting trans women to let them know about the project and ask if they were interested in taking part.

In March/April 2010, eight trans women joined together for the initial six-week training on Participatory Research Methods. Some of the women already knew each other from other groups or networks but most did not and given that none of the women had had any previous contact with Engender it was a new and exciting venture for all concerned.

Women Thinking Disability

Women Thinking Disability comprised two groups:

1. A group of mothers and grandmothers linked to **Oaklands School**, Edinburgh, who initially came together in December 2009 around the issue of proposed education cuts.
2. A group of disabled women living in a residential care home in Perth who want to raise issues around access to services.

Women TIC

In April 2010 Engender met with Communication Forum Scotland (CFS) to discuss the possibility of joining together the aims of the Civic Participation Network Project (a CFS project funded by the Scottish Government) and those of 'Equality Counting'. That is to say, making it easier for people with diverse communication support needs to access training and capacity building events, thereby increasing voice and participation.

An email was sent through the CFS network and several groups and individuals came forward to note their interest in becoming involved in 'Equality Counting'. The response was very positive and there was quite a wide geographical spread of interest from groups in Aberdeen, East Lothian and Inverness.

Methodology

Participatory research (PR) is known by a number of different names, including action research, collaborative inquiry, and contextual action research, but all are variations on a theme. Put simply, participatory research is "learning by doing" - a group of people identify a problem, do something to resolve it, see how successful their efforts were, and if not satisfied, try again.

PR is used in real situations, rather than in contrived, experimental studies, since its primary focus is on solving real problems.

The 'Equality Counting' project outline states that *"women will be trained to design and carry out PR then supported to apply these acquired skills, knowledge and confidence to design a PR project around their disadvantage in accessing appropriate public services due to their gender or gendered inequality"*.

The WTTI women were supported to develop their own research questions and research plan to explore the issue(s) at hand and then design the appropriate PR tools and approach. They were given a basket of tools (choices) and some shared knowledge to add to their own experience so that they could develop their own approach.

The onus is on service providers to face the challenges of enabling true participation of disabled people and people with diverse communication support needs in decision-making processes, recognising that disabled people wish to participate in different ways. For 'Equality Counting' this had implications for the way in which we were able to introduce the PR methods and tools. For some people, particularly those with communication disabilities, the issue of time can be crucial to an inclusive communication environment and a slower tempo can be the only accessible pace to ensure understanding and allow participation. Access in meetings and training sessions therefore required attention to their length and timing.

Processes

In using PR approaches across the three c-o-is it was vitally important to hold to strong communication support principles alongside recognised good practice in community engagement.

- Involving the women from the start of the process
This encouraged working in partnership, meaning that participants did not feel decisions had already been made without them.
- Working at a pace that suited both Engender and the women
We knew how important it was to allow enough time for group members to consider the issues properly and it was important to us that they were able to do so.
- Providing information that was clear, timely and accessible
If we didn't allow the women enough time to take in the information, we would effectively have excluded them from the participation process.
- Providing a range of ways to participate
Not everyone necessarily wanted to get involved at the same level or in the same way at different stages of the process.
By providing a range of participation methods we were able to increase the opportunities for women to get involved in a way that suited them.
- Providing support to increase the opportunity for involvement
As well as support with communication, some participants required help with transport to meetings, or required support to build confidence and capacity.
- Providing participants with feedback and outcomes from all sessions

The establishment of shared goals between the women across the different geographical areas was not particularly difficult since the issues and priorities for action were depressingly similar. The main challenge was in supporting the women to organise in ways and around issues as appropriate to them.

For example, instead of following the route taken by WTTI, the Women TIC chose instead to participate in focused peer discussions on their chosen issues and to make important links with to the shortfalls and pitfalls in service provision as also highlighted by the Women Thinking Disability.

Expectations

From the outset we had to consider Engender's expectations of 'Equality Counting' as a project. Beyond enabling communities of women to address their issues of concern it was our hope and expectation that increased participatory research and support work with a diverse range of communities-of-interest would improve our capacity to serve women in Scotland by grounding our policy work in the real experiences of women managing the consequences of their multiple/ intersecting identities.

We also had to consider the expectations of the WTTI group and also be aware of the expectations of individual group members. These expectations did shift in emphasis to varying degrees for individuals over the process of the project and we had to be able to adapt and respond to such shifts in terms of the support provided to the community and to individuals with it.

“Learning, sharing ideas... a sense of doing something no one has done before with a group of people who I share values with.”

The Women TIC carer’s group was keen to participate in ‘Equality Counting’ and to consider not only their own issues but to highlight that information should be a right, not something that has to be searched for by people who are in vulnerable situations such as experienced by relatives of stroke patients.

Another aspect to be mindful of was that, over time, as the different c-o-is had increasing contact with ‘Stakeholders’, (the EHRC, the Equality Unit at the Scottish Government, NHS Boards, Local Authority Equalities Officers etc.) they were also each bringing their own expectations.

Outcomes

Across the ‘Equality Counting’ project we were looking to effect change for women who suffer inequality and disadvantage, supporting them to have greater choice, control and empowerment over their own lives in relation to accessing public services.

For the women involved in the WTTI community of interest, the desired outcome was to gain skills and confidence to build on their existing knowledge and experience so they could carry out participatory action research on inequality of access to health services by transsexual women.

It is really important to note that the most positive outcome for Engender as an organisation has been our move further along the path towards trans inclusion. We hope that this will not only help us in our work tackling gender inequality but will also help other organisations and agencies to improve transgender inclusion in their services. We have also had a wonderful opportunity to work closely with the other two communities of women we had previously had limited direct contact with (disabled women and women with diverse communication support needs). Important links were made and we are committed to doing further work with Communication Forum Scotland and Chest, Heart & Stroke Scotland as well as Capability Scotland, Oaklands School and any other interested organisations, agencies and groups.

Roles

We actually employed two Participatory Researchers to work with us on Equality Counting since we were covering a bit of ground both geographically and metaphorically speaking.

Our Projects Director also worked with all the groups, facilitating discussions, conducting individual interviews and supporting the work of the Participatory Researchers. We also had a number of wonderful volunteers and interns working with us on the project over the year.

Group members took on a variety of team/group roles. Each bringing valuable strengths to the group while at the same time having limitations which together the group worked around. Everyone had at least one and possibly as many as four natural team roles which included:

- Implementer – turning ideas into practical actions. Turning decisions into manageable tasks.
- Completer-finisher – Painstaking and conscientious, seeing tasks through to completion.
- Monitor-evaluator – Offers critical analysis. Has a strategic view seeing all options.
- Shaper – Task orientated, making things happen. Dynamic, outgoing and challenging.
- Resource-Investigator – Diplomat with many contacts. Improviser, exploring opportunities. Enthusiastic and communicative.

Impacts on individuals

Through the process of the project, members of each of the c-o-is were able to build their confidence and ability to articulate their concerns in a variety of settings, to describe their campaign objectives and strategy to a range of audiences and to communicate their progress in a variety of ways.

Many of the women who participated in the project have since become Engender members and we hope that together we can continue to move forward, learning from each other to the benefit of women in Scotland.