



Echo - empowering agencies; empowering communities

Notes from a dissemination event held on 31st March 2009
At the Workspace, All Saints Road, Wolverhampton

Participants

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Steve Corton	Dudley MBC
Kate Green	Dudley Council for Voluntary Service
Sam Hill	Dudley PCT
Jody Pritchard	Dudley PCT
Su Pascoe	Age Concern
Sheila Gill	Wolverhampton New Deal for Communities
Dolors Medina	Wolverhampton City Council
Ian Cooper	Sandwell Borough Council
Lal Salter	Wolverhampton Federation of Tenants organisations
John Waterfield	The Faith Network
Debbie Dale	Worcestershire Council

Facilitators/presenters

Jill Bedford	changes
Sam Axtell	Wolverhampton Partnership
Richard Ashwell	Wolverhampton Learning Partnership
Lorna Prescott	Dosti
Leighton Pendry	Dudley MBC

Discussion feedback: why does community influence matter?

National government drivers in the form of targets, policies and auditing arrangements (and Education Quality Audit)

Although there are these drivers, it is the right thing to do anyway: link decisions to grass root levels - to the people who are affected by them

Got to get away from the idea that 'we' know what's good for people - officers are there to do a job and feed reasons through to people. E.g give the reasons for rate charges, not 'consult' and ignore what people say

Decisions can be challenged in the future

Worse to do community engagement badly than not at all - leads to disaffection

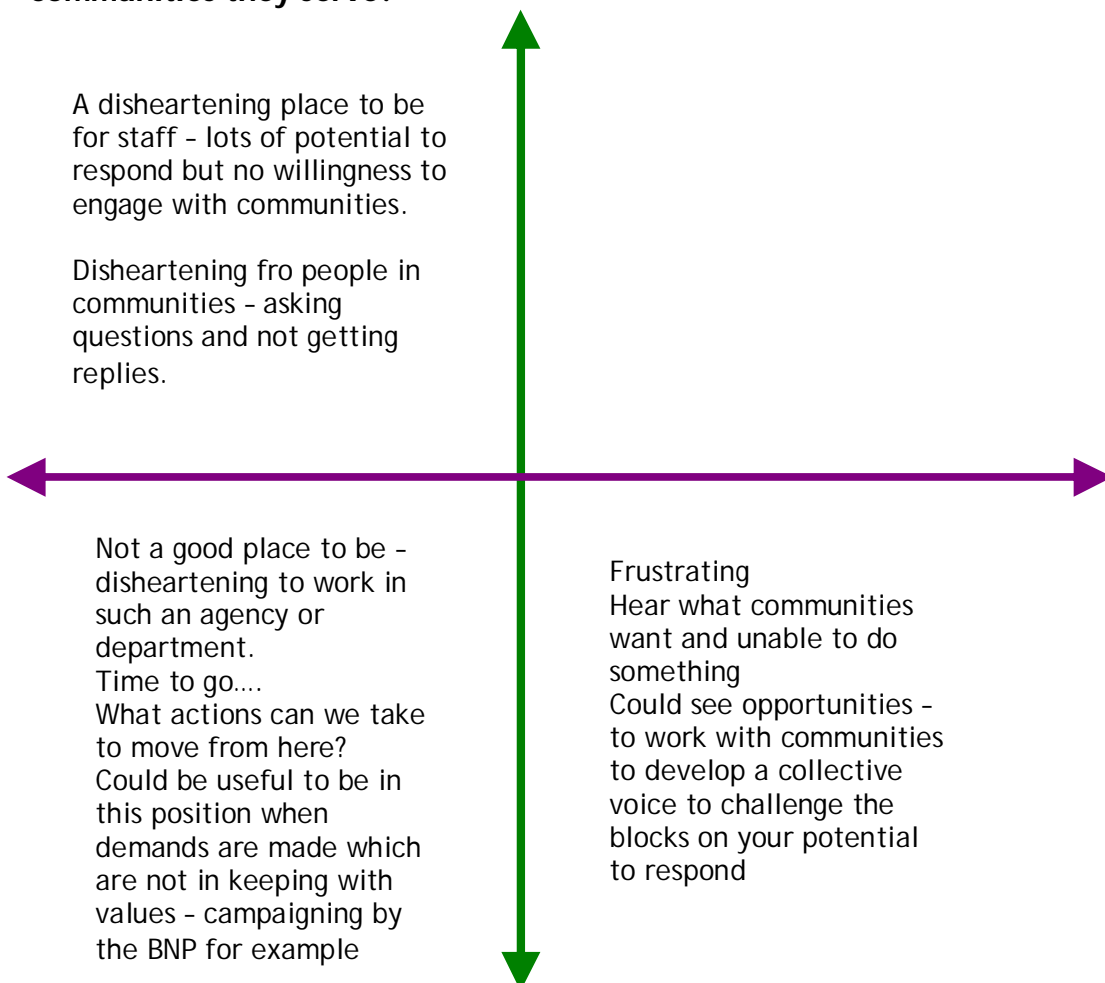
'Community influence' as a term is different to other terms used in this field (such as consultation and engagement) as it implies change as a result - where power lies

People may feel more 'empowered' - move away from apathy and cynicism? We lack a suitable language - if people feel that their opinions matter, something changes for individuals and the wider groupings

It matters for people as citizens, for service providers and for policy makers/strategists....for different and similar reasons
 Why? Need to delve a bit deeper - about the type of society we want to live in, about robust democracy...societal values
 It matters as we need to get away from the concept of the citizen as customer of public services - move away from using market relationships as the rationale for policy and action. Customer implies choice. If we take market metaphor further, influence on companies comes from the shareholder rather than the customer.
 It matters so that decision makers make 'the right decisions', especially regarding decisions that impact on community cohesion.
 Because the experts don't always see what is needed - for example some work in a health agency with clinicians was leading to investment in neurological services, but when dementia sufferers were asked what they wanted it was advice with benefits, someone to talk to and so on. The result was a shift to investment in nursing.

Discussion feedback: Echo Quadrants

What are the implications of your quadrant: for public agencies and for the communities they serve?



Comments.....

- Can you ever have no potential to respond - maybe it should be intention to respond? You could then have 'no intention to respond' - would agencies admit to this - honesty issues all through this
- Maybe 'freedom to respond'?
- You can be positioned very close to the 'negative' ends and still fulfil legal duties to involve and consult!! Not that onerous
- Treating people as able to engage in the discussion
- Manipulation is always a part of it
- Disengage from politics because they don't feel their voice makes a difference - decisions already been made - formulas etc
- An outcome could be agencies consider their known cultures looking at how many decisions could be shifted along the axis
- 'agency' theory not current in PCT

How could echo be useful to you?

Questions you wouldn't generally ask - new opportunity

3rd sector Voice constraints within city/LSP mechanisms of consultations not all in one place

Embedding consultation/engagement into business perspectives

NHS dabbling in engagement - a trigger for discussion in the PCT maybe

Useful catalyst for discussions - but how realistic is it that you would have the right people around the table for each issue?

There has to be a desire at leadership level to be involved

ABCD and Dudley PCT - use Echo with my team - stick up the slide with the positions on as something to think about, make small changes as a team, use for both individual and collective work in the team.

Dudley CVS- use Echo with commissioners in the public sector, to help identify barriers to community involvement in commissioning

Dudley CVS - use with large voluntary organisations, to assess how open to influence they are.

Dudley MBC - use it in relation to work with community groups, and try to address some inclusion and equality issues using Echo and Voice

Worcestershire - using echo with elected members induction, parish councils and LSP

Age Concern - can see use of echo with Board of Trustees. Would like to investigate voice as well

Wolves City Council - would be fantastic to use with PING

Sandwell - potential to use at the start of a new School Partnership Board - 13 heads meet together

Closing comments

- Completes the circle of the Pathfinder - voice, take part citizenship programmes and now echo
- Feels like a taster - now like to buy the whole meal
- Really useful - go back and argue for budget to make it happen
- Food for thought
- Brilliant - energy and ideas....



The Black Country Take Part Pathfinder project is managed by Wolverhampton Voluntary Sector Council. It forms part of the Take Part Pathfinder programme which is funded by the Department for Communities and Local Government and managed by the Community Development Foundation.