

Action we took...

this list gives details of some of the actions and projects that BME participants got involved in during the project:

"Attending my first Community Council meetings"

"Getting involved in the newly created Leith Community Radio"

"Participating in the Leith Open Doors' Shadowing project"

"Designing a survey that we used to interview people at the Mela in August to inquire in BME's views on community issues and their engagement in the decision making processes"

"Joining the Community Voices Network and taking part in a major conference in Dundee focusing on the Community Planning process"

Some highlights of the process

"Our visit to the City Chambers where decisions are made, gave me the positive attitude and confidence on how big this project was."

"I thank the facilitators for letting us talk and be ourselves with their guidance I have become more confident, and that I could and would stand up and voice my ideas and opinions more readily than before."

"Because services providers were participating in the project, I recognized the chance for me to articulate difficulties I was experiencing particularly in searching for meaningful employment."

"The course started off with exploring participant's knowledge and understanding of community planning."

"This is a subject I would never, in the past, have had an interest in and which was quite different from my area of expertise, medicine and health in general... The fascinating thing is, as I gained more understanding of community planning, my interest in the subject increased and I found I was enjoying the process more and more. I think most of it had to do with the methodology used (participatory inquiry) which appeared fairly un-orthodox initially but quite fun and turned out to be a very good way to learn."

"I have thought about why participating in this program was so enjoyable to me. And I think it was about having the platform to express my opinions and understandings about issues and to have people listen without judgment. This is something that has never happened before during my stay in Scotland."

Recommendations to decision-makers

"I think decision makers need to be aware that Edinburgh's BME residents (and many other groups) may not always be aware of, or readily able to access, current local community representative processes. As a consequence, conventional public consultation which uses those processes is not often eliciting a range of views which represent the city's population. I think the BME voluntary and community sector should be able to engage with the public sector through the mainstream processes, such as community councils, but I can now understand that that can be difficult."

"From an officer's perspective, in order to improve services it is important that all voices are heard. I appreciate that it would not be practical for all staff involved in equalities and service delivery to go on a course that was a similar length as the GYVH project but I would recommend, however, that if a course or consulting mechanism could be created that allowed officers to mix and speak to people from different backgrounds then I think this would be beneficial for all."

"I believe we need to make sure that people know what we are talking about. I can't assume that just because I know what I mean by Community Planning, Community Engagement, Regeneration or whatever, everyone will have a common understanding of it. Let's develop

this understanding from the outset."

"We need to be conscious not to get trapped into taking the easy route. If we are genuine about engaging communities, we need to recognise that this takes TIME. A process like this couldn't have happened overnight. We needed time to form the group, build trust, develop strategies together, and get involved in real life issues."

"Resources need to be found to ensure that the BME participants can be supported to become advocates for change and engage within their own communities. In particular, it's vital to find ways by which emergent BME leaders can be supported if they decide to get involved in their Community Council and other local decision making bodies."

"Because we received a honorarium for attending the meetings, I felt that my time and experience were valued. I strongly recommend that other organisations look very seriously into the issue of compensating community representatives for their time and commitment."

"When I joined this project, I was inspired to discover that the group wasn't made of the 'usual suspects'. Making sure that a wide variety of people is included in any consultative or research project is vital for the renewal of democracy and the engagement of BME people in public life."

Participants

Residents of North Edinburgh/Leith:

Reginaldo Dias, Celina Mbwirira, Masi Muguwe, Alice Musamba, Mrs Ashan Singh, Naren Sood, Subash Punn, Kulwinder Singh (Representative of Sikh San Jog)

Part-time participants:

Catriona Reece-Heal, Nigel Bathgate, Sanya Bedeewi, Sophia Latif, Zakra Ali, Donat Mubiligi Ngendo

City of Edinburgh Council (CEC)/Health/Police participants

Graham Croucher, Sports Officer, CEC
Anna Herriman, Local Community Planning and Regeneration Unit, CEC
Jackie Mearns, Community Learning and Development Worker, Leith Community Involvement Project, CEC
Rashpal Nottay, Ethnic Minorities Project Co-ordinator (Mental Health) Royal Edinburgh Hospital
Sergeant Euan Smith, Safer Communities Unit, Lothian and Borders Police
Ben Wilson, Principal Planner, City Development, CEC

Facilitators: Vèrène Nicolas, Nick Wilding and Gina Headden
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Get Your Voice Heard!

'Quotes' Report

December 2006

"I wanted to join the group so that I could meet members of the BME (Black and Minority Ethnic) community who I would normally not get an opportunity to meet... and officers from other departments in the Council on a "level playing field"

"Participating in this project has been an extremely valuable experience... this space has provided me with the opportunity to interact with communities and understand their views regarding being members of the Scottish society and their experiences of living in North Edinburgh."

"I expected to learn about how land use planning can better involve members of minority groups in Edinburgh. In particular, I hoped that the project could lead to black and minority ethnic residents of north Edinburgh and Leith becoming more involved in the planning of the long-term major urban growth on the city's waterfront."

"Given my inexperience in working and interacting with people from BME communities and my role with the department's Social Inclusion Group and active input in preparing and implementing strategies and action plans, I felt it would be appropriate to put my name forward for the Get Your Voice Heard Project."

"I decided it was going to be a good chance for me to improve on networking skills and my participation in various community groups."

"I was initially concerned regarding the remit regarding attempting to influence policy and strategy of the Scottish Executive and CEC. I thereafter got the impression that we set our sights slightly lower and talked about influencing at a local level and working our way up. I felt that this was wholly appropriate and a more manageable and sustainable forum."

[This] advert appeared before the New Parliament was opened:

"No public sector experience. No political aspirations. No friends in high places. You are the perfect candidate for the public board post"

This made me think that I would like to get involved in public service and see how I could change my area or if I could help in some small way. I was turned down on more than 4 separate occasions. Then some years later I was asked if I would like to get involved with Get Your Voice Heard Project. It was the best thing I have done in a long time."

"I was keen to improve my understanding of the community planning process, share my knowledge and experience of working in local government and take the opportunity to network and establish new contacts."

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centre for human ecology



Get Your Voice Heard!

2005-2006, North Edinburgh and Leith

Personal development... and learning... and friendship

Community Planning... Community Councils... and the challenge to 'Get Your Voice Heard'

"I have learned about the low profile that the main community representation processes, for example community councils, have among many BME people in Edinburgh."

"[One] element of the project which stood out for me was the report describing two group members' different experiences attending community council meetings in north Edinburgh and Leith. That report suggested that there are currently failings as well as successes in achieving truly representative community councils."

"community planning is a complex process ... most ordinary people feel generally distanced from planning and delivery of services ... most of it is expert driven and does not involve the people at the receiving end and it begs the question 'who is being served?'"

"[One of the sessions] that stood out for me was the final session in September when we heard about the experiences of some of the members of the group who attended Community Council meetings in the area where they live. Their experiences were mixed with positive and negative aspects but it proved to be an interesting and fresh insight into local democracy. I was surprised to hear that some in the group were not made to feel welcome at the meetings and that the Community Council were suspicious of them and their reasons for attending the meeting."

"I would like to highlight the input from the Edinburgh Council's Officer regarding Community Councils as being the meeting I found most beneficial. I recognised that this would be an ideal vehicle for BME members to have a real influence at local level. [I realised] they would not only be influencing a community reaction in relation to BME issues but would also get involved with generic community issues."

"I attended as an interested individual and at the same time had interest in what contributions I could make and receive for the mental well-being of men from ethnic minorities living in Edinburgh and Scotland as a whole."

"Community planning is by no means a small subject matter. It has different aspects to it. This may be the reason why there are so many sectors pertaining to offer a particular service to the community. This is quite evident in the BME voluntary sector; where you get projects with similar names but claim to offer a different service to the community, it would be recommendable if each group could define its role and functions. The name/label BME gives a false sense that this community is small. If one considers the different ethnicities in this community maybe then can we only understand the functions of the different service providers in Leith and Edinburgh."

"I have gained so much knowledge; have a good network of friends and contacts... I am now in a better position and confident in taking up any community involvement challenges that comes my way. I will be sharing and using the skills I gained in developing ideas on how my community can be empowered in getting our voices heard."

"My attitude has changed as a result of my involvement in this group. For the last three/four years, I was hesitant about engaging with ethnic minority communities. Now I am back and would like ethnic minority communities to get involved in decision-making and services' planning processes."

"There are many social problems in our society and they are more evident where poor people live. [To] create a way that brings people together in an open and respectful manner is the only way to solve most of our problems."

"During the process I gained a good understanding about myself - what I was really about and I work best. I rediscovered my need to express opinion on issues of interest and I understood why some of the work I have done in the past were so uninteresting and mundane. In this realization, my task of achieving my most important objective (finding meaningful employment), has become even harder because such jobs are few and very competitive - but is it possible to find a way out?"

"I am enjoying life in [a] way I haven't done for years. I feel such a great sense of wellbeing and want the feeling to continue. So in a lot of ways, my life has improved."

"I have an improved understanding of the different communities, identities, backgrounds and cultures that exist in Edinburgh and a better appreciation of how they came to live in Scotland and their experiences since moving here."

"I feel I have a better appreciation of how we should be more careful not to make assumptions about what the public know and don't know about local service delivery."

"When I hear or read about news in the media about ethnicity, religion and cultural identity I feel I have a new perspective on these issues and a more informed understanding of what is being reported."

"I have gained personally and professionally from my involvement in the project. I took a great deal of personal satisfaction when Alice attended the West Pilton Community Council Meeting."

"I have learned that there are officers in other departments of the Council who are as committed to genuine community engagement and tackling the issues of engaging the BME community as I am. In Community Learning and Development, there is an assumption that we are the only ones who struggle with these issues, or who have a commitment to improving the experience of "engagement" for communities. It was a pleasant surprise to discover kindred spirits in the (to my mind) most unlikely of places!"

"I learned that despite regarding myself as a staunch anti-racist and humanist, I still hold some residual internalised stereotyping of people. I hadn't realised just how few BME people I actually know. I have gained some great contacts, and perhaps even friends."

"I am a lot more "conscious" about how I go about my connection with individuals I work with - I have been re-awakened where I didn't realise I had been sleep-walking."

"The meetings themselves did not only provide a melting of ideas for individuals and their respective interests. It provided the opportunity to give ideas on how I wanted to shape the community that I lived in."

"It has been a very good learning experience and I have realised that North Edinburgh is an extremely important area from a business and cultural point of view."

"This project has also provided us with the space to network with professional and community leaders. This group has been very strong and can bring changes in relation to lobbying involving decision-making. I believe we could not have achieved this without anyone member of the group."

"I am not used to frequent meetings because my profession is musician and I am also working part time as cleaner. Sometimes I felt a bit tired and some issues interested me less than others; but these moments are a good opportunity to practice patience."

"I have learned much more deeply how it feels to be a resident in North Edinburgh, and the particular challenge that racism continues to exert for mental health and community well-being."

"I also learned to love the stories some of the older members of the group shared; stories about far-off times and places that, however, bring richness and life to my sense of the bubbling community that North Edinburgh already is, and what incredible potential there remains to unleash."

"I learnt how conventional 'mailshot, advert and a few presentations' public consultation can fail to engage people."



What's next?

"I hope that in the near future, planners like myself will be able to carry out an ongoing dialogue about the development of the city with truly representative community groups, leading to a better understanding of all citizens' needs and aspirations, and consequently a better city."

"[During] session nine, Alice and Celina reported their experiences attending community council meetings, and we heard first hand about the delights as well as practical difficulties of engaging with 'stuck' local community councils... it seemed like this was really action research in practice - that these folk had been incredibly brave to try something out, and that we had collectively helped to make this possible"

"My next step would be to ensure that the views of ethnic minority communities are taken on board when senior managers are developing strategies."

"There are many sectors of society that might gain from an experience of this type and it would be wonderful to see the process being replicated in other community groupings, as well as for further groups of BME participants."

What was missing?

"Looking back, it's a shame that we did not have 'youth' attendances/participation during the meetings."

"It would have been great to have 2 or 3 people from the same ethnic community so that we could support each other in spreading what we've learnt and in engaging with real issues. If 2 or 3 of us are present at meetings, it would also help us be more accountable to the rest of our community."

"Tackling institutional racism is a major challenge. It doesn't feel to me that we've talked enough about it. Is getting involved in local decision making processes really going to make a difference? I wonder."

1: Joining the JOURNEY

We recognised ourselves as a **UNIQUE, DIVERSE** group of **PROFESSIONALS** and **LOCAL RESIDENTS**... we decided **TOGETHER** how we would build **TRUST, RESPECT** and a sense of **PURPOSE** for our journey **TOGETHER**

2: Leith MAPPING!

We mapped BME organisations and local services... realised overlap=potential for connecting **WHAT ALREADY EXISTS...**

3: Our Themes...

"[One] memorable session was brainstorming issues to look at during the project. The issues prioritised were mostly general concerns and interests of city residents, rather than particularly "BME issues"

- Leith and Granton Development
- Culture
- Local Facilities
- Neighbourhood / Housing and related topics

Leith Docks Consultation

"When Ben gave us an input on the Leith Docks development plans, I was astonished to discover that none of the numerous BME organisations in the area responded to the consultation document. This raised serious issues on the effectiveness of consultative processes and as to whether local democracy exists at all."

"... I cannot get my mind around the mechanisms involved in planning such a venture and the impact on the environment. I think it is such an ingenious project and I wonder what understanding if any local people have about it to enable them to effectively influence decisions in this regard."

"I have been inspired to hear the story of a community councillor, who shared his passion with us for a morning and left me deeply appreciative of his long-term commitment to his community, and asking myself deep questions about my role in my own place"



"I believe that stimulating debates is important to build more critical and conscious citizens. In that way the project was successful."