

Women and Leadership, Participation and Involvement

- Training
- Development
- Support
- Women Making Changes



We hope you enjoy reading this report. The process of putting it together reminded us of all the enjoyable times we have had with women who have been involved in learning with us.

Thanks to everyone involved.

WFC

Working for Change is a group of five women who have been doing research, consultancy, community development and more over the past

25 years. We are involved in all kinds of related work, although our main focus has always been on women and the community development activity that challenges existing power structures and provides opportunities to transform women's lives.



Introduction

Working for Change have produced this report as a way of sharing some of the work we have been developing over the past few years. We hope it will provide inspiration for others who are interested in working with women around increasing their desire and ability to participate in the decision making structures that impact on their lives.

This report briefly outlines the history behind the work and provides a summary of the content of the courses we have run. This is important as it reflects many of the very real issues which women attending our courses have been interested in exploring. A number of women with whom we have had contact are increasingly involved in aspects of public life, and feel confident that they have the right to be there and make their voices heard. It is important to note that many of these women continue to have contact, both formally and informally. We believe that this is a crucial aspect of work around 'participation', enabling women to share experiences and support each other in developing their confidence, knowledge and skills. Mentoring has played its part, an aspect of this work that can be fruitfully developed.

The funding for the courses has come from a variety of sources, for which we are grateful. A charitable trust funded us to do some development work around women, participation and leadership. Part of this funding enabled us to develop and support the running of the Encouraging Participation course. Particular mention should be made of the Wolverhampton Health Action Zone who contributed towards the publication of this report, in addition to funding several courses as part of their programme of involvement and participation. We have also worked with Sandwell Women's Enterprise Development Agency to obtain funding from Greets Green New Deal for Communities for another run of the course in their area.

We would also like to acknowledge the support from the Wolverhampton Asian Women and Diabetes Group, some of whose founding members attended early courses. The group continue to offer support, in terms of providing training space and a place for women to meet and get support from each other on their journey.

This is not a training manual and we have not included any of the specific information and materials that we have used. Because we believe it is important to hear real voices, and not simply our interpretation of what women are saying, this report shares some of the themes and questions that women have addressed during the sessions. We have tried to provide a cross section of comments and views taken from the write-ups from the different courses.

We would like to thank all of the women who have contributed so much of themselves and their lives and hope that they find something of themselves and their journey reflected in this report. Indeed, we hope it will inspire them to continue to speak out and make their voices heard in all aspects of their lives.

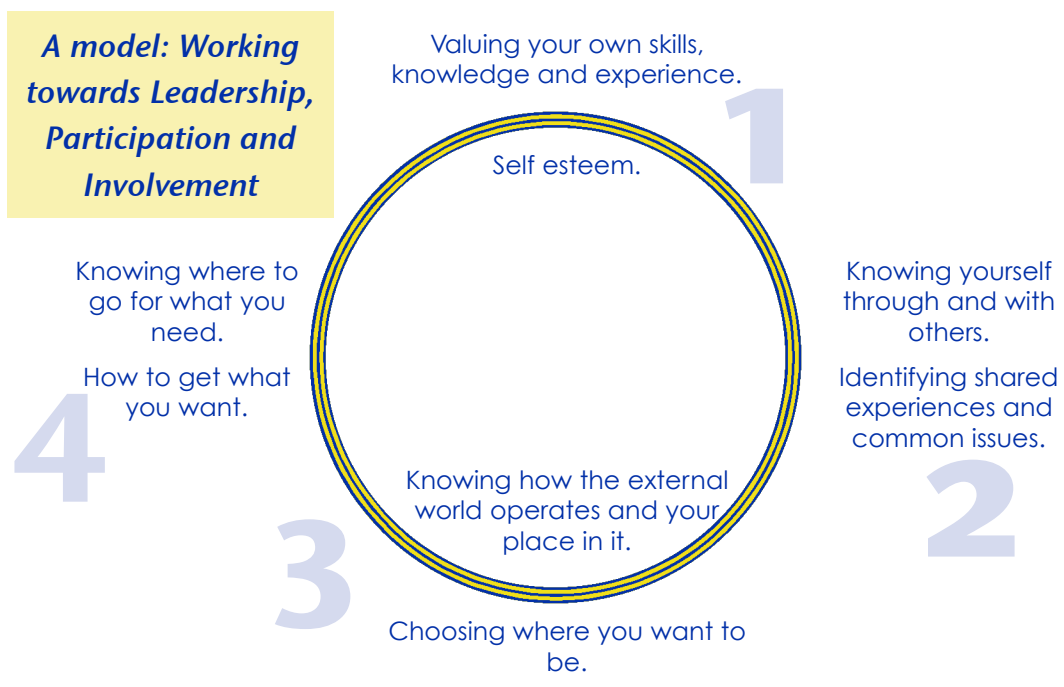
Where it all started

In 1999 Working for Change delivered a series of workshops in the West Midlands for a local charitable Trust, on the theme of women and community development. As this work progressed, we were surprised by the lack of understanding about what might be involved in women's development as well as any strategic thinking about changing the reality of many women's lives.

For the previous eight years the Women's Health Matters Project in Wolverhampton (formerly Women Making Changes) had been working with women around the theme of women, leadership and participation. As a result, a model for future work evolved that has subsequently resulted in a more focused approach to community development work with women.

We recognised that, in spite of the existence of a variety of 'women's initiatives', ranging from specific projects to women's training programmes, there seemed to be little in the way of positive networking, with many women and women's organisations still feeling marginalised and excluded from mainstream political activity. This was reflected in several research studies including Oxfam's *Challenging Assumptions: gender issues in urban regeneration* and *The Gender Report – Women and Regional Regeneration in the Midlands* (CURS, University of Birmingham) Both reports found that, while they may well be active at community level, women are less often found in influential positions within urban regeneration programmes. In terms of public policy, it appears that there is 'persistent lack of attention to women's inequality' (CURS) and 'no systematic way of ensuring women's needs and concerns are built into planning' (Oxfam)

We wanted to work with women to change this situation and ensure that they have the potential to access the places where decisions are made, priorities set and resources distributed. While personal development work and confidence building is a



strategic thinking

key component, it is not enough to create real and lasting change. As well as being able to access existing services and resources, women need to be equally involved in decision-making that affects themselves, their families and their communities.

Our model evolved from reflective practice, where time was taken to consider the ways in which we had been working with women over the past decade or so, and to tease out the key components to successful work. In order to provide opportunities for women to start to recognise their potential for leadership and participation, the model proposes that there are four essential ingredients. Each suggests specific learning outcomes, which combine to create the conditions for women to be confident and active in the public domain.

The process challenges the notion of individualism and competition by bringing women together in association, to collectively reflect upon and analyse the barriers to and opportunities for creating change for themselves and others. We suggest that once women make these connections, and see their own concerns and limitations reflected in the struggles of others, they can collectively develop strategies around how to overcome the barriers and make positive changes.

The Four Essential Ingredients

1. *Valuing your own skills*

Here the focus is on work with individuals, whether in terms of confidence building, validating life experiences or practical skills development, for example, presentation skills, public speaking, chairing meetings, budgeting, planning, dealing with difficult situations, being more assertive. In general, these can be the building blocks towards increased self-esteem and an acceptance of one's own value and experiences.

2. *Knowing yourself*

At this stage we can reflect upon our own situation in relation to the wider context of women's experiences. It provides the opportunity to make sense of the things that shape our lives, for example, education, religion, family, motherhood, sexuality, class, race, economic dependence, etc. It is at this point that we realise that while we have many experiences in common, we are all products of our particular and diverse cultures, backgrounds and traditions. If we can learn how to value ourselves and communicate with others in a genuine way, we are in a better position to develop a network of support, deal with inevitable conflicts and work together to make positive changes.

3. *Knowing how the external world operates...*

To be able to change things and get our voice heard we need to know how the system operates: how decision-making structures are set up, how these structures work, who is involved, how accountable they are, who holds power in any given situation. This means knowing about local, national and international structures that impact upon our lives. If we are clear about our place within the system; as a voter, a constituent, a consumer, a citizen, we start to have a clearer understanding about our rights and responsibilities. Once we have this knowledge we can make choices about where we want to be, for example, an elected member, a school governor, an MP, a magistrate, on a Citizen's Panel...

4. *Knowing where to go...*

In order to change things we have to make our voice heard, ask people for information and know how to get what we want from individuals and organisations. This can involve negotiating, campaigning, lobbying –or simply being more assertive!

Getting involved in public life



Enjoying being involved.

2

The aim of our work in the West Midlands is to build strong and well-informed women's development activity, which starts with the active involvement of women in public life. We are doing this by supporting and providing opportunities for women to gain the skills, knowledge and confidence to increase their participation in their communities and in the decisions that affect them.

There are three main strands to this work:

Strand 1

A programme of training, support and mentoring for women around citizenship, personal development and social transformation including:

- Two accredited courses called *Encouraging Participation* and *Women Working in Communities*
- Informal mentoring
- Skills development
- Round table events
- Visits and links with other groups
- Visits to local, national and European seats of government

Strand 2

A series of focused discussions/workshops for women who have some knowledge of women's development and some awareness of the issues around social, political and personal transformation including:

- Sharing experiences and strategies for change
- Updating knowledge and skills
- Shared facilitation of workshops
- Writing articles for discussion

Strand 3

Practical support to women around achieving change locally

- Facilitation of aims and objectives and action planning
- Support to develop local community needs research
- Supporting access to relevant information
- Campaigning and lobbying

strong and **well-informed**

Getting involved in public life

Encouraging Participation: The Course

Some background

The initial course that began in January 2000 focused on women's own experiences and opinions, while also setting out to understand and explore local, national and European decision making structures within the context of health issues.

A set of guidelines had just been issued by the Council of Europe stating that:

Governments of member states, including the UK, should ensure that all citizens are able to participate in all areas of decision-making in their country's health care systems, at national, regional and local levels, and that the principal of participation 'in all aspects' of health care should be observed by all healthcare authorities, managers, professionals, insurers and all other 'operators'.

Further recommendations suggested that member states create legal structures and policies promoting citizen participation and patients rights in their health care systems, and that they should adopt policies to encourage and support the growth of voluntary organisations of health care users.

The committee set out differing levels of participation, ranging from:

- Influence on the overall decision making processes.
- Furthering particular interests through organisations of patients or citizens.
- Elected or user representation on boards or executive bodies
- Direct influence over the provision of health care through individual freedom of choice.

The emphasis was on encouraging citizens to take responsibility for their own health, 'revitalise representative democracy' and 'enhance social cohesion' which would lead to a more effective health care system and a better balance of interests among the various stakeholders.

Making it real

This sounded very encouraging, but we were well aware that many women feel daunted by trying to deal with different

aspects of the health care system and face many different obstacles. However, this directive gave us a context in which to build our model of participation and leadership, promote a model of community development that we felt could work and develop an appropriate training course.

The success of the pilot course encouraged us to develop it further as a more generic accredited course, reaching out to any interested local women.

The main topic areas were:-

- What is citizenship?
- What is democracy?
- What is leadership?
- How do campaigns work?
- Getting your message across
- Getting organised & getting support
- Opportunities for participation

Since then we have run the course five times, involving diverse groups of different ages, with and without children, some in employment (full-time or part-time) and some not, of different ethnic backgrounds and cultures. This diversity has brought a rich mix to discussions, including experiences of both democratic and non-democratic systems of government and how this affects women's lives. The course has recently been run for women from different Asian cultures and is currently being delivered as a mixed course for members of the Black and African Caribbean community in the West Midlands.

The focus is on participation in the wider community and public life such as:

- local community groups
- local political groups or local decision making bodies
- national organisations
- national campaigning groups
- national decision making bodies.



Themes: summary

The following is a synopsis of some of the issues and themes raised during the many and lively discussions during the courses.

Women's participation in public life

What helps?

To have my own identity, be my own person • Stop reacting to other's expectations and stop pleasing others all the time • Not taking all the world on our shoulders • Letting go of standards – of housework • Redefining guilt and shame for not keeping all the balls in the air all of the time • Be proud and happy with own identity and culture • Learn the ropes – the rules of engagement • Communication skills • Support, mentoring and personal encouragement • Knowing the right people to pave the way, introduce you to systems and people • Payment and expenses for taking part • Knowing what's going on and where to start • Making the first move • Having the confidence to do it • Being valued for what you contribute • Respected and not put down • Affordable childcare • Better disabled access • To feel that there is an opportunity to contribute and participate • Being prepared • Knowledge of the topic

3

What hinders?

Physical and emotional pulls on your time and energy in the domestic sphere • Childcare issues • Financial dependence on others • Being employed with childcare and domestic duties and responsibilities • The costs of participation – travel, childcare, clothes • Lack of knowledge or opportunity to participate • The hidden rules of engagement; format of meetings, speaking through the chair, tabling papers • The skills and confidence to take part • Cultural barriers – people mistakenly assuming things about women because of their culture • When culture and religion do limit what women can do • Being an older woman – becoming invisible • Not being listened to • Timing of meetings – night time, tea time, school hours • When other women at meetings play the "male game" • Own negative self worth • Not being taken seriously

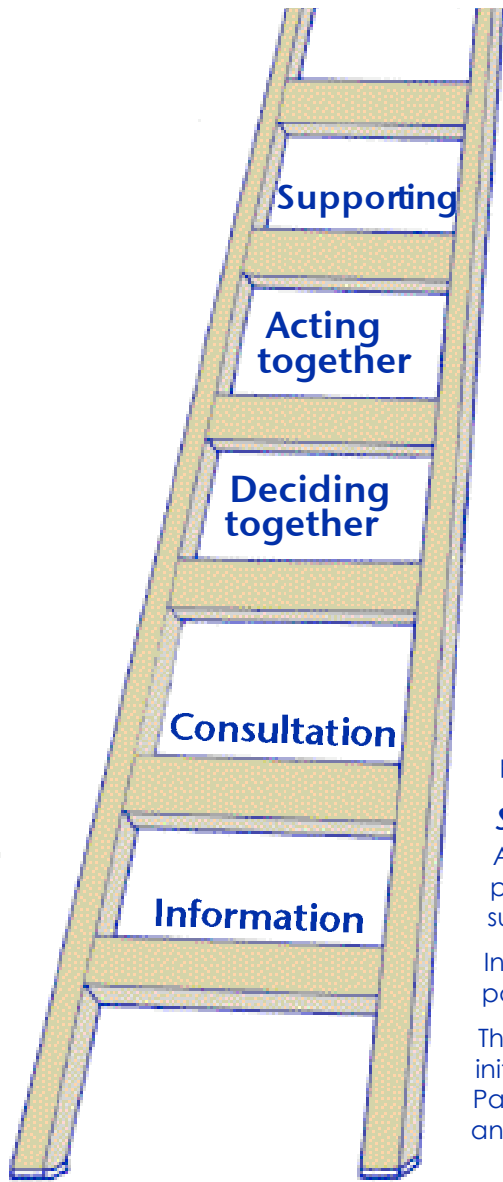
Becoming more inclusive

What those 'with power' must do to ensure greater participation:

- Be prepared to share power
- Be willing to change – motivation is the key
- Recognise that the structures need to change – not just the people
- Develop people via training, mentoring, familiarisation
- Reduce the use of jargon
- Use a variety of different approaches to engage people
- Provide transport and childcare
- Develop more effective communication

Similarly, people who are not engaged will also need to shift...

- Take more interest in the decisions that affect them
- Be more assertive and believe in self
- Recognise that anything is possible
- Don't allow themselves to be talked down to
- Talk to, encourage and support others
- Access training to develop skills and understand processes



We looked at the Ladder of Participation

This helped us to think about what we mean by “participation” and at what different levels it might happen. We explored one simple model (evolved from Sherry Arnstein’s original model – see Appendix 2). It is useful to identify which level is on offer to us. It might also help us to understand why we sometimes feel as if we are up against a brick wall!

Information: People get told what is planned.

Consultation: An organisation identifies the issues, offers a number of options, and listens to feedback.

Deciding together: An organisation encourages others to provide additional ideas and options, and join in deciding the best way forward.

Acting together: Not only do different interests decide together what is best, but they form a partnership to carry it out.

Supporting independent community initiatives:

An organisation helps others do what they want, perhaps within a framework of grants, advice and support provided by the resource holder.

Information is essential for all participation but is not participatory in itself.

The ‘lower’ levels of participation keep control with the initiator but they lead to less commitment from others. Partnership operates at the levels of Deciding Together and Acting Together.

SWOT analysis around women’s participation

Women have found this a useful way of thinking about their own situation and what participating and getting involved might mean to them:

<p style="text-align: center;">STRENGTHS</p> <p>Women's experiences Inclusive and holistic ways of working Strong Versatile Teachable/sharing/learning Sensitive Good listeners</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">WEAKNESSES</p> <p>Not enough time for ourselves Rushed off our feet Guilt – oughts and shoulds Feeling that we have to be there for everyone Hard to say no Superwoman – doing it all</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">OPPORTUNITIES</p> <p>‘Me time’ Assertion skills Working together better Taking up new chances Legislation New approaches to decision making Human Rights Act</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">THREATS</p> <p>Economic independence – for some women who are dependant Benefits trap Lack of information on rights Institutional racism Poor practice – cover ups Ideas about women’s place being in the home, marriage</p>

Desert Islands



A group of women are marooned on an island and need to create a new community... think about

what it might look like, how decisions may be made and the leadership qualities needed to make things work.

Some fantastic islands have emerged over the years!

Communal space • Shared responsibilities • Collective rota for chores • Getting together to decide strategies and goals in the short and long term • Adapting to the environment • Private space (and toilets) • Shelter first and then other needs – Maslow's hierarchy of needs • Clothes and secure food supplies – be practical • Fresh water source nearby • Look after the physical and emotional health of each other • Formal meetings each day to plan the day • Time for relaxing alone and together • Ground rules agreed • Taking time to listen to everyone • System for resolving conflict – mediators maybe? • A long-term strategy – wanting to stay or not? • Do we need a system of punishment and sanctions?

Qualities that are considered to be useful on the island included:

- Good communication and listening skills
- Confidence in own abilities
- Can accept being challenged and able to challenge constructively
- Knowledge of the "field" and understanding of the issues you are dealing with
- Negotiation skills
- Able to delegate in a supportive way
- Honesty and trustworthiness
- Consideration of others, able to compromise and be flexible
- Having vision and be inspiring
- Motivated with energy to get things done
- Respect self and others and be sensitive and diplomatic
- Non-discriminatory
- Know your own limitations and vulnerabilities

make things
happen

“I can do that”

What are the hallmarks and characteristics of ‘leaders’ in our society?

- Clear, quick and decisive, good in a crisis
- Charming and gifted – special – with charisma
- Having a manufactured public image
- Good communication skills
- Personal prestige – up the ladder
- Being seduced by power
- Convincing in arguments
- Sometimes physically big – a presence
- Visible
- The role is legitimised and authority conferred through formal structures
- About winning, money and status
- Having a vision for what you want to see happen
- Summarising and finalising discussions and decisions
- Manipulate by scheming and fear

A classic model of leadership?

With the best of leaders,
When the work is done,
The project completed,
The people will say,
“We did it ourselves”
Lao Tse, Tao Te Ching 17

Servant-leadership is a practical management and leadership approach based on shared power, collaborative decision-making, and rigorous honesty.

Another way of looking at leadership

- An agent of change
- Secularisation of a Christian term
- Being a teacher and being teachable
- Giving out the responsibility and the resources to get it done – true delegation
- Facilitate people's learning
- People feel they have done it themselves
- Leading from the back, or leading from amongst
- Valuing the different skills and gifts that people bring to a situation
- Echo a quiet strength
- “I can do that”
- Make the tea and do the other unseen maintenance tasks that keep it all going
- Leading by example
- Able to make mistakes and not punish self or others
- Humble at times when needed
- Make opportunities for success and achievement
- Co-ordinate things and then make them happen

Servant:Leader model of leadership?

Looking at Power

When women have felt powerful:

Being a mother • Having the confidence to pursue problem at work and see it through • When in charge of a meeting – feeling a power flow • Organising meetings – well organised, knew the subject area and felt in charge • When receiving an apology • When conflict is discussed • Getting a job and using my skills • Being successful at fundraising • Helping clients get what they need • Taking charge – removing child to a new school • Knowing you are capable • Knowing you are right • Challenging the gatekeepers – having your say • Being seen as a positive person by others • Telling husband either get a job or pack your bags and go

When women have felt powerless:

Immigration services • Not fitting into a group • Family power dynamics • Not being in control giving birth • When complaining about particular services – feel it's stacked against you • Trapped in work • Not handling emotions well • Being interrupted and silences • Being labelled • When I assumed that I would be believed and wasn't • patronised • my views ignored • outnumbered • Bereavement; feeling not in control, expect me to be strong • Funding for fencing and central heating from the council – not getting anywhere and nothing I can do about it • Being a mother

What is power in our society all about?

Money and resources • Influence • Having the control of self and others • Knowing the hidden rules and being part of hidden networks – exclusive club • Having a particular education • Being a particular class, gender, race, caste and colour • Conforming to the status quo • Making the rules and using them to your advantage • Feeling above authority, feeling exempt from rules and law

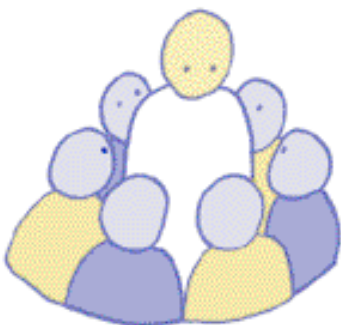
In our exploration of power, we considered various definitions:

Power is the ability to shape action (S. Lukes)

Ability = Resources • Knowledge • Support • Opportunity • Will • Time • Strength • Skills • Motivation
Formation • Form • Outline • Approach • Control • Define

It can also be seen as:

Power over...

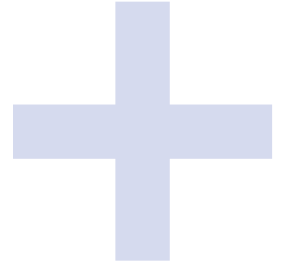


Influence a situation
Managerial leadership
Authoritarian leadership
Controlling
Policing
Patronise others

Power with...



Sharing
Being inclusive
Fairness and equality
Sharing information
Power of a group together



free to choose

We recognised that it is complicated, and that sometimes we are more “powerful” than others – sometimes we have more access to resources, knowledge and support or those things that increase our ability to “shape action”.

Some of the powerless groups in society:

- Elderly; vulnerable, poor, often alone with no relatives, can be isolated, ill health and sometimes with a disability
- Women; stereotyped, cultural, racial and sexual discrimination, violence
- Children; bullying, no voice that is heard, no rights, victims of separation
- People with mental illness; no rights
- People with disabilities
- Refugees and asylum seekers
- Poor people; no money or resources to draw on, homelessness, poor housing
- Unemployed people
- Gay men and lesbians
- Black people

Who are the powerful groups in society?

- Established faith groups – generally male dominated leadership, controls money, land and investments
- Police – seen as legitimate authority
- Teachers – influence they can have on young people
- Doctors, Lawyers, Immigration Officers
- The media – control, communication and money
- Political parties – the government – local politicians
- Multi-national companies – hold the country to ransom
- Banks – money control
- Masons – secret influences
- Inland revenue – no questioning
- Lobbying groups – some more than others
- Men as a group

controlling
influences

Is power on a continuum?

This helps to understand how people feel and think about the choices they have and the power in their own lives. Some people think that all that stops us is the limits we place on ourselves. Others think that what we can achieve is shaped by society and individuals are limited by things which are bigger than one person.

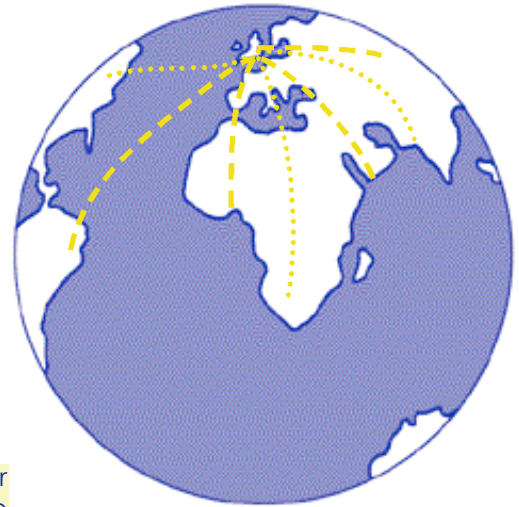
People's lives are structured or determined by race, class, gender, etc, with little choice



Individuals are free to choose what they do in life



Belonging and Unbelonging



We asked participants to draw their families movements around the world....

We felt that where you or your family are from is very much part of your identity, even if you have lived somewhere else for a long time.

When we felt we belonged

Felt part of a team • Felt loved • With people with similar beliefs • With people who share my culture • When people support you and you support them • This group - transparency and integrity • With people who understand and experience my condition • Someone I can talk to and who will understand

When we felt like we didn't belong

Where there is leadership without consultation • When issues are not discussed • Feeling excluded from decisions that are taken • When I was a new face in the group • When I first came to this country • When feeling on your own and no-one can take someone's place

Issues around Belonging

We noted that the characteristics that bind people together are also used to exclude others, to make pejorative judgements – to class someone or a group of people as the 'other'. The basis for prejudice and discrimination.

Knowing the rules
Feeling accepted
Similar values and beliefs
Feeling safe
Language
Colour
Culture



Having money or a job
Experience with others –
a history
Status
Geography – where you
are
Appearance
Class and caste
Sexuality

Prejudice is the ideas we have about people which are often based upon preconceived notions of what someone will be like – stereotype, labels associated with particular groups of people e.g old people, black people, young people, posh people, women etc

Discrimination is the way we act towards people based upon our prejudices. This can either be positive or negative – favouring some types of people more than others.

Oppression happens when those people who have power and access to resources actively discriminate against other groups of people so they are denied access to resources, fair treatment and equal rights.

Human rights and citizenship

Human rights charters

We considered the differences and similarities between three different charters on human rights: South African freedom charter; USA bill of rights; European convention on human rights.

This led to interesting discussions about the different 'rights' and 'freedoms' accorded to different groups and individuals in our society

What do we understand by Citizenship?

We considered what being a citizen means to different women. These are some comments and thoughts.

- Suspicions around government's agenda for active citizenship – reduces their responsibilities for providing decent public services?
- Human rights and citizenship are different– citizenship laws do not cover abuse of power by the state or basic human rights – the right to have children, shelter, the right to choose how you live without persecution.
- Human rights– more broader and global, citizenship rights– more specific within the boundaries of legislation of the country you are in.
- Can have citizenship and still have no or few rights in practice; the rights of girls, corruption and bribery, women's status and the right to speak.
- Duties are enforced and responsibilities are through choice.
- Citizenship– a legal status where you can express your opinions and vote. Where you have the right and entitlements to benefits. You have the responsibilities of paying taxes, sending children to school, registering for voting.



Responsibilities of being a citizen

To respect each other • Respect the law– (we debated GM food and whether individuals have the right to break the law to make a point) • To respect your own home and land around it • To find out what you need to know– health, education, employment and housing • To run organisations and your family

Rights of being a citizen

To be treated equally • The right to disagree • To be loved • To watch the TV of my choice! • To be where I want to be at any time • To stand up for my rights and those of others

Types of Governments we have lived with

We acknowledged that women have experienced living under very different governments and regimes including:

- Kingship and Dynasty
- Democracy
- Colonialism
- Apartheid
- Direct Rule

Our experience of Democracy

Women looked at their own experiences of 'democracy in action' in the contexts of workplace, home, church, schools, mums and toddlers

When it has worked well...

When everyone agreed with decisions made • When there is understanding of the democratic system you are using • Caring for each other's opinions • Being prepared to compromise • When able to contribute • Having dialogue and people listen • If action comes out of the talking • Seeing the results • Having shared aims and objectives – motivation

When it hasn't worked well...

Lack of communication • No clear aims and objectives • Limited choice – not knowing the rules • Does the practice mirror the philosophy? • Different interpretations or what democracy means • In a changing group context = developing and growing • When there is unequal knowledge – they know best • Hidden agendas and manipulation • Unclear rules • Not having enough time to make decisions in the way we want to • Not having enough money to support people to come to meetings • Having bad advice or conflicting advice about how to implement democratic structures in the organisation

Visit to the English Parliament

There were a number of visits to Parliament organised through the local MP's office.

Reflections on the visit to Parliament

Enjoyed Stranger's gallery most of all and would like to go there again • Realising that 30 families ruled Britain – keeping the power through intermarriage • Surprised how small the debating chamber is • Interested in knowing more about the pairing system for voting and the different ways of making decisions • Seeing MPs and Lords in the flesh • Meeting Diane Abbott and Jenny Jones • The debating style – quite personalised at times and aggressive • The pomp and ceremony • Feel as if I want to get involved more

Planning a trip to the European Parliament

Two groups got together to plan a trip to Brussels. They came up with a list of questions to send to the West Midlands Regional Office in Brussels, hoping they would be able to provide some responses when we met them. The Office in Brussels had not encountered a group who had sent questions in advance and who had taken the time to inform themselves on the EU!

In general the trips were a success, if a little hectic, and most women felt that it had been a worthwhile experience.



On Going to Brussels with a group

"A very basic grounding in European politics, made me realise how little interest the British take in it."

"...looking out for each other and getting to know each other better. I found out that one of the women is from my village in India. The visit to Brussels was an eye opener, lots of things I didn't know and now know them."

"A shared experience can be more rewarding. Partly because of the varied personalities and views, knowledge etc. Dynamics of a group!"

"The never ending wonder at human diversity and its richness. The diversity of personalities within a group simply, multiply and magnify the learning experience."

"I found out about MEPs, I hadn't even known their names before."

"It was great to make collective decisions as a group and watch how decisions are thrashed out. Hopefully the group will be long term friends."

"How complex a matter it is with the diversity in Europe."



At the West Midlands European Office in Brussels

Other highlights of the course

Presentation Skills

An intensive day exploring and using presentation skills with Natasha Carlish. Hard to describe – you had to be there! Natasha gave us ideas, tips and tools and we had to use them to present our stories and ourselves to the group. We were all surprised at how much can be achieved in such a short time.

A Gender Audit

One group did a small piece of research into some local structures and forums in Wolverhampton and then gave a public presentation. The organisations were informed about the context to the research and were invited to the presentation event. We chose the organisations at random.

See Appendix 4

Round Table Events

Each group invited women to come and share their experiences of being actively involved in public life in different arenas. The women have included: Chief Officers and Chief Executives, Further Education Principal, Managers, Chairs of both public and voluntary sector organisations, local Councillors. They were from a variety of different backgrounds, countries and cultures.

The questions addressed were:

- What motivates you?
- What made you start to think, "I can do that"?
- What has helped you?
- What has got in the way?
- Which strategies have you found useful?



These events have proved to be very positive ways of bringing together some of the fundamental issues for women around participation in public life. We feel it is useful to include a good range of comments, as many women will undoubtedly identify with certain aspects.

About a hundred women have attended four open events over the past three years, listening to the speakers and then getting together in groups to share and reflect on their own experiences

The following represents the composite views of speakers, minimising personal information that was shared at the sessions.

What motivates you?

Parents – not expected to fail; mum as positive role model • Doing public service and wanting to serve • Being a bread winner for the family • Wanting to make a difference • Being a natural trouble maker • Motivation changes as go through life – balancing public activity and private life • Seeing other women succeed and develop • Wanting to be an independent woman • Need to develop my own identity, be successful and avoid the stereotypes • Having to fight for space for myself • It was 'in the family' • My background as an Asian woman and rejecting the expectations • The need for mental and spiritual stimulation • Motivated and inspired by the way people overcome injustice • To be able to shape history • Finding the best in everyone • Interest in politics for as long as I can remember • A desire to make a difference and then the belief that I actually could make a difference • The immigrant work ethic and rebel mentality • Inheritance of a work ethic and a belief in the seriousness of work. • The idealism of the 1960s and 70s • Fixated by the notion that whatever we do, we have to hand it on in a better shape than when we first got involved - a belief that the college is a public asset and I need to show stewardship and look after it for future generations.

What made you think, "I can do that"?

That feeling emerged as I went along • Starting to say I did that and I can do some more • I could do it better than a lot of other people • Secretly thought I could do it – took a long time to admit this out loud and some days still not too sure! • Started not to care too much about what others thought of me • I can bring a different view to this issue • Brought up to feel that making a difference matters • Parents belief that ordinary people can make a difference • A personal crisis and then getting involved with the women and participation course • Encouragement from other women who have made it into certain positions of power • Most days I feel that I can't do it!!!! And that feeling doesn't go away. I'm both excited and terrified and feel that at any moment I will be found out! Perhaps I'm just better able to disguise all of that now!

What has helped you?

Education and the grants system for Higher Education • Good physical and mental health • Being financially independent and having choices • having lots of work to do • the many individuals who have given me support • asking for help when I need to • parents dedicated to education • being a single parent and having to stand up for myself and my rights • excellent childcare – the single most important thing for the advancement of women • recognising that I do not have to be perfect or please others • being in the right place at the right time • surviving all the blunders I made • being direct with people • I need to enjoy what I'm doing • Family support and other networks • Shrugging off 'failures' • Self-respect and respect for others • Valuing differences between people • As a Black woman being elected as a local councillor • Not being afraid to use the power that we have, for the good – not in a way that corrupts, abuses and exploits other people • I always believed in feminist ideals, but this didn't match with the expectations of my very traditional Sikh upbringing • Personal development- interpersonal skills/group dynamics have helped to make me not intimidated by men.

What has got in the way?

Not having gone to University • Choosing to go against the grain – being difficult at times • Surviving – the energy it takes • Lack of self confidence • Feeling muddled • The world outside – a shifting world that affects us • Thinking that others knew the master plan – if only I too knew what we going on, then I would know what to do and how to do it : a myth • My short attention span • Fear of flying – fear of trying it out • Family expectations – not to get above yourself • Not knowing when it was appropriate to say some things and not others • It's still a man's world and you need to learn to take the knocks • Men and women with no children are still in the top positions • Bastions of male culture • Being put down because you are a 'lady' • Rigid social roles • Guilt and other people's expectations • Racism – but you need to rise above it – try and work out what is going on – separate the behaviour from the person

Which strategies have you found useful to help you keep going?

Joining in the debate and finding my voice • Working across the boundaries • Avoiding cliques • Developing full range of inter-personal skills and styles • Knowing that as women we can be very powerful • Always speak in a meeting • Share things like childcare with other women • Never say 'just' or 'only' when talking about yourself • Don't take it too seriously • Prepare the ground, don't wait to be asked • Networking – friends and family • Keep going back to the source for sustenance and comfort • Wanting my children to stand tall and comfortable with their place in the world • My faith in God and not bearing grudges • Trying to understand where people are coming from • Learning to prioritise • Embracing difference and creating awareness of those differences • Having mentors and role models – being prepared to be mentors and build networks as part of our everyday lives • Keeping a goal in mind and not letting others knock you off course • Finding ways of juggling and prioritising • Strategies for being organised and the ability to say 'no' • Making time for ourselves • Never give up – if you feel hurt or frustrated, talk to people • I think women are natural leaders – the way we socialise, nurture others and stand up for them • Working collaboratively. I believe that successful women don't work alone. They are better at this than men. • A sense of humour • Facing up to problems and recognising the need to understand when things aren't working • Women's management styles allow them to get stuck in and own problems.

Important Themes

We need time for ourselves or we will have nothing to give out to others • Vital to have a goal, keep focused on what's right for you and not let others knock you off course • Information helps to remove ignorance and prejudice • Be assertive and not aggressive • Change is never easy, but worth it in the end • We all need mentors, support and networks so that we can off-load, have someone to admire etc. • Remember, you are not alone • Support, support, support – find it and use it! • We wonder whether the male model of power is at odds with the way women work • We must think about what is needed to ensure that women can participate fully • We do not start with a level playing field. Do we need positive action or should we be able to get there on our own merits? Does the system allow us to get there on our own merits • Why do women restrict themselves, even when the opportunities are there for them • We need to make sure that we recognise women's needs and don't create barriers. It's important to consult with the people we are trying to provide services for • It's not just what you do – it's the way you do it that's important

A Selection of comments from participants

Some of the comments from women who have attended these events:



"Mighty oaks from little acorns grow – I am as yet a little acorn, although quite mature! I hope I can overcome self-doubt, in order to aspire."

"Can we have more women in public office as speakers."

"Different, but equally interesting speakers. Good mix of women"

"It would be good to have such an event arranged whereby young, disadvantaged women can hear how other women have achieved, as an inspiration that they can do the same."

"Lovely to hear stories and journeys. Some more please!"

"Brilliant. We've all been through something. But we're all together"

"A great experience. Learned a lot."

"Today was an eye opener."

"I am leaving today, full of hope and ideas"

"Interesting, informative, inspirational. More, more, more!!"

"Very informative, enjoyable and inspirational to my own journey."

"Women empowering women!"

"Fabulous! Really moving and inspiring. More please"

"Brilliant! Comforting to meet like-minded people."

"To wonder is to live"



Comments from participants

Reflections on the Course

The following are a selection of comments from the different groups

What I gained for myself

'Motivation: to "get out there"'

'To aim higher (however slowly!)

'I have gained confidence to be bold. Before I used to hold back, but now I speak without being fearful. If anybody asked me if wanted to join this or that, I used to say no because I used to think I was not good enough. That has changed now. Even if can not spell I still try.'

'Friendship without strings. It feels good to share with others a common bond, regardless of different backgrounds/situations etc.'

'There's an awful lot I don't know'

'I have a gained a whole new range of friends. People, I would not normally have met.'

'To know that I am not alone. It is good to meet with people who can share common themes. It is also good to learn with women and make new friendships. To exercise and improve one's own skills in communication, tolerance, understanding, listening, talking and supporting. (What is learned can lead to minor and major re-evaluation of thought, view and outlook).'

What I found out

'That a lot of information that is supposedly 'readily available' - is not. In some circumstances you need to be a cryptologist to work out who and what to ask! And that even if you do get that far, how many of us have the courage to pursue things?'

'I have found that there is lots information out there if you go to the right people or organisation'

'I found out how many different bodies and committees work. And also found out there is always someone to ask when you know where to look.'

'Even the supposedly inaccessible can be reached if you know how.'

What I learned about decision making

'The ideal is collective, but someone who is willing to take on the role of spokesperson is an advantage when a decision is required within a specified time.'

'I still have some difficulties in making decisions, but, I am much better than before.'

'There are times when decisions need to be made And also the importance of group decisions and being responsible/accountable – participation.'

'I had to give up the course before the end. This, I hasten to add was not because I was not enjoying it! What time I did spend on the course was most informative. A lot of women, me included, had no idea of political issues or even any idea of things going on around us. I cannot comment on the trips!..but people I know who did go say what a great thing it was to do.'

'This practical course did a lot of soul searching and brought together women working in a wide range of areas of work who exchanged different experiences and views. Together we strengthened our own perceptions and identities through group work, course work, role-play and homework. We learned about barriers to participation, leadership, political structures at a local, national and international level and a whole lot more.

It was very detailed and very interesting with the chance to actually see the process

working at Parliament and Brussels.

It is a shame there aren't more courses like this!! Thank you all so very much for the 'EXPERIENCE!!'

'I'm glad I took part in this course, It has been an experience that has helped me immensely. The hardest part for me was to actually get in a taxi by myself and have the courage to come to the meetings. Yet before my accident in 1994, I ran my own business and was studying for my MBA .

The first day I said I was here to observe and didn't think I would be able to sit through the sessions but everything was done to enable me to continue the course. The Brussels trip was important, in terms of actually getting there and also because it was stimulating and encouraging to be able to see the workings of the Parliament.

My disability had become a barrier and I needed to get involved in something. I've recently been asked to sit on the board of a local Women's Enterprise Development Agency and have also been encouraged and supported by them.

Thank you to everyone for the opportunity to change my life and enable me to get fully involved in the things I'm interested in.'

What next?

We hope you have found this report stimulating and feel inspired to support the further development of this work.

What started out as one course has turned into a significant piece of work involving mentoring, training, networking and organisational development. The focus has been on working with women as individuals and bringing them together to discover and share their commonalities and differences, and to challenge each other to make some changes.

There are at least two other facets which need to be addressed in order to ensure that women take their rightful place at the many tables where decisions about our lives are made:

- Creating infrastructure to encourage, support and sustain women's development and participation
- Working with policy makers and decision makers to ensure that their approach and procedures change in such a way that women feel welcome and included in meetings and decisions

WfC has started working on the former by helping to support the development of a network of women's organisations in Wolverhampton, in order to better represent women's interests at the Community Empowerment Network and on the Local Strategic Partnership. In addition, this network could draw down resources to develop the women's voluntary and community sector and provide organisational development to women's organisations and groups. It could also be used as the sounding board for consultations with diverse groups of women around a variety of issues and help to develop specific projects which arise from the interest of it's members.

The sky's the limit!

An area we would like focus upon in the future, is work with those who currently have the power, resources and legitimacy to set the agenda in terms of who participates and how.

If you would like to discuss or follow up any aspect of the work we have been doing, please feel free to get in touch with us. We want to share what we do in a collaborative way to ensure more of this work happens.



	Content or Focus
One	Introductions, ground rules, what helps and hinders participation, ladder of participation
Two	Leadership, belonging and non-belonging, human rights and identity, power and powerlessness
Three	Exploring citizenship
Four	What is a democracy? How laws are made
Five	Houses of Parliament – visit
Six	Citizenship and Human Rights Prepare research project
Seven	Campaigning – getting organised and getting support Research project European Parliament visit planning Round table event planning
Eight	Round table event Report from research project
Nine	European law and structures
Ten/Eleven	Visit to European Parliament
Twelve	Getting your message across
Thirteen	Presentation skills and arguing your case

Appendix 2 The Ladder of Participation

Sherry Arnstein, writing in 1969 about citizen involvement in planning processes in the United States, described a ladder of participation.



1 Manipulation and **2 Therapy** Both are non participative. The aim is to cure or educate the participants. The proposed plan is best and the job of participation is to achieve public support by public relations.

3 Informing A most important first step to legitimate participation. But too frequently the emphasis is on a one way flow of information. No channel for feedback.

4 Consultation Again a legitimate step. Attitude surveys, neighbourhood meetings and public enquiries. But Arnstein still feels this is just a window dressing ritual.

5 Placation For example, co-option of hand-picked 'worthies' on to committees. It allows citizens to advise or plan ad infinitum, but retains for power holders the right to judge the legitimacy or feasibility of the advice.

6 Partnership Power is in fact redistributed through negotiation between citizens and power holders. Planning and decision-making responsibilities are shared e.g. through joint committees.

7 Delegated power Citizens holding a clear majority of seats on committees with delegated powers to make decisions. Public now has the power to assure accountability of the programme to them.

8 Citizen Control Have-nots handle the entire job of planning, policy making and managing a programme e.g. neighbourhood corporation with no intermediaries between it and the source of funds.

Arnstein's ladder of participation suggests some levels are better than others. Perhaps different levels are appropriate in different circumstances.

Appendix 3 **Report of visits to Brussels and London**

Two women summarise their experience of the first trip to Brussels

As a part of our course, 'Women and Participation' we decided to organise an overnight visit to the European Parliament in Brussels. This was to tie in all the subjects covered on the course. We had already visited the Houses of Parliament in London and it seemed a natural conclusion to visit the European Parliament.

The actual practicalities were harder for some than others. Most women had a lot of commitments, as most women do, but the majority of us were lucky enough to be able to organise the time, although we know we'd miss the members of the group that were unable to go.

We hired a mini bus to take us from Wolverhampton to Waterloo Station to catch the Eurostar. Unfortunately we arrived at Waterloo just after the Eurostar had left! The tickets stipulated no refunds or transfers unless prior notice. After a group discussion we decided to use some of the skills learned on our course. Namely 'You can do it' and 'question authority' Using these skills at the Eurostar enquiry desk we managed to get our tickets transferred to the next departure. In fact it worked out quite well as we had time to relax and chat, and decided on a collective money change and so saved on commission fees!

We arrived in Brussels, grabbed three taxis and headed for the hotel. The taxi drivers all spoke some English, but we were surprised at the different nationalities; our particular driver was Moroccan.

After arriving at the hotel we allocated the rooms between us, no one seemed bothered who they'd be with or where, which seemed a good sign about how well we got on as a group.

That evening we armed ourselves with a map and took ourselves into the city. The hotel turned out to be very central and so it was easy finding our way about. The whole place was buzzing even late at night, every shop was open. We discovered a huge music and culture festival happening in the main square. It was truly magical with a wide array of different bands, orchestras and visual artists and we had a true taste of how cosmopolitan Brussels is.

Next morning we had an early start so we could pack in as much as possible. Our first place of call was West Midlands European Regional Office. We were given a talk by Lisa Maltagliati, the Policy Officer. She was excellent and answered our many questions and queries really well and made us feel good when she said our questions were the most well thought out she'd had. She told us all about their work promoting and looking after the interests of the West Midlands. Even though we had studied how the parliament is run and what it does, to hear from someone who has actual day to day contact with it, gave us a new perspective. She told us about our representatives, the MEPs and which relevant areas they were responsible for and she gave us masses of literature.

We then made our way to the European Parliament. The building itself is very modern and quite impersonal. We went to the chamber, which was not sitting, so we could talk freely and look about. Our guide pointed out the physical layout and how the seating is actually split into political groups not into countries, We all liked the fact it was a huge semi-circle, so you felt everyone was equal. One of the biggest aspects about this parliament is the fact there are so many languages spoken. They have hundreds of people translating everything as it happens, it was mind-boggling. We heard about the fundamental powers it has, power to legislate, the power of the purse and the power to supervise the executive. We began to understand how much this chamber changes our lives, without us even realising. He told us all about how the budget is spent and who gets what. Everything is held in public and it felt accessible, not aloof, like the English Parliament.

Every one of us felt it had been really worthwhile and had taught us so much. It made us realise how close Brussels is to us.

We also felt personally, as a group, that this trip had taught us a lot, dealing with things that were for the good of the whole group and not just the individual: almost like a miniature parliament. We all got quite confident with our French speaking after the two days and came to the conclusion that the English were lazy with other languages because we are an island. It was also interesting to see how your perceptions of people changes, when instead of seeing someone for a couple of hours a fortnight, you spend 48 hours with them! Everybody agreed it was a really worthwhile visit.

Cheryl

I found it an eye opening experience to see the place where the members of the European Council met. The make-up of the membership, how the presidency changed and the frequency of the changes. On the agenda was to meet and talk with Simon Murphy.

I was struck with the friendliness and approachability of the workers at the European Regional Office, who represent the West Midlands region on a host of matters. We were able to put questions about how European decision making took place.

The relevance of the visit for me was to become better informed so as to inform and help others to see the relevance of taking part in all aspects of decision making.

All in all the effect of the visit was mind blowing - the structure, the different bodies including their make-up of members, the various channels of communication and the decisions that effect everyone.

It was important to see the parallel in the national and local decision making bodies we have, that have direct or indirect influence on our lives.

We had a great time in being together and enjoying each others company - bearing in mind that we have all come from different backgrounds. We enjoyed the experience of the restaurants, the challenge of trying to order food and making our decisions known in a foreign language. We all enjoyed immensely the musical concert and of course the chocolates that Belgium is famous for.

What I have learnt?

- That it is important to register how you feel about decisions taking place.
- To get involved.
- To see how we women could improve on or enhance the decision making structures be it on health, employment, social, educational or recreational activities for women.

What will I do with what I have learnt?

- Encourage women from all backgrounds to become activists in decision making.
- Enable and bring to the forefront the capacity that women have to make change.
- Give women the skills to empower and work on the potential within themselves.

Kanta Chankria

Appendix 4 **Summary of the gender audit**

The questions were:

- How many men on your board/group/forum?
- How many women on your board/group/forum?
- How many people with disabilities?
- How many Black and/or Ethnic minority members?
- Who is the chair?
- How does one get on the board?

Analysis of the information given by the respondents:

There was very little systematic recording of equal opportunities information for most of the organisations we talked to and much of what we were told was anecdotal. It still was not clear how to become a member of many of panels, Boards, Committee and Councils.

The experience of doing research

Each of the course participants was asked to reflect on what they learnt and how they felt on doing this investigation. The following points sum up their reflections



'Felt as though I'd cheated as I'd asked a neighbour who was involved in the group; it's often who you know, personal contacts.'

'Difficult to get information if you do not know who to ask; possibly asking people who cannot give you what you need and they do not know how to get it either.'

'Waiting for people to get back to you and they never do so; feel frustrated and not taken seriously.'

'Made appointment to see Chair but it had been double booked and my appointment didn't happen; turned up and wasted time.'

'Felt we met on an equal footing.'

'If you have a job title to do with health you are treated with respect; if you ring up as a member of the public you are held in low regard.'

'Picked up the attitude that I was not welcome asking questions—exclusive domain of the professional; asked if I was a GP.'

'You need to know in order to know.'

'You need to have some background knowledge of the organisation and its structure.'





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