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Equalities Office

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Women Take Part

Women's learning, support and development

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Women Take Part

Women's learning, support and development

This 'broad brush' research into specific work geared at more women gaining the skills, knowledge and confidence to enter and stay in public life, attempts to map and categorise a fragmented field covering the voluntary and community sectors, higher education and the public sector.

We specifically asked about learning opportunities **for women** that directly relate to women becoming more active in community and public life.

Several issues made the research process complex:

- ownership of material
- putting work into the public domain
- building trust in a time of uncertain and competitive funding
- relevant work not easily identifiable due to 'packaging it' in relation to new funding priorities

Consequently, we were aware that there could have been other learning opportunities that were missed during the research process.

A snowball sampling approach was used over a period of several months to circulate invitations to participate in the research and 27 organisations and networks were identified which offer learning, support and development to women around becoming more active critical citizens. 18 actually took part in the research and these are mostly located within the community, voluntary and third sectors.

The two key aims to this part of the Women Take Part Research were:

- to explore the range of opportunities 'out there' for women
- to ascertain the relevancy of the 'Four Essential Ingredients' used in the Take Part Learning Framework, to see how useful it is in different contexts with different women.

Range of opportunities

The research identified **four general approaches** to working with women to develop skills, knowledge and confidence around becoming, and remaining, active critical citizens in the public domain. These have been drawn from interviews, discussions, and conversations as part of this research, as well as existing and current papers, research and evaluation work undertaken elsewhere.

Courses

Structured learning programmes linked to mentoring and support during and afterwards.

Holistic approaches

Women's organisations offer individual and group support and mentoring around specific issues. They support women in taking control of their lives and in starting to see a role for themselves in the public domain.

Networks

Local and national networks with a focus on women's support and development. A source of research, information, support and shared strategies.

Partnership approaches

Alliances of organisations working towards agreed aims led by either the voluntary and community sectors, or the statutory sectors, around 'engagement'

The focus was on direct learning and support and so most of the qualitative research was about the first two of these categories.

Seven organisations that deliver such publicly advertised women's courses were identified and six were interviewed. Four Holistic approaches were identified and all were interviewed. These support women in crisis, such as Domestic Abuse

The notions of **created space** and invited space are used to draw attention to the origin and motivation of the initiatives. Different opportunities come from different agendas and motivations.

'**Created spaces**' refers to action and thinking within civil society; women's groups, voluntary and community organisations that are often motivated by a passion for women's equality and social justice.

'**Invited spaces**' refers to action and thinking within government departments and structures; local government, Partnerships, national departments and Quangos, that are motivated by policies designed to increase democratic activity and citizen engagement. In this research, invited space initiatives were motivated by women in key positions who are also passionate about women's equality and social justice.



The majority of provision is located in created spaces which emphasises the importance of the women's Voluntary and Community Sectors as a mainspring for women's civic and civil engagement and involvement. If we accept the premise that we need to **increase the pool of women** available for civic and civil engagement and involvement; then due thought and consideration has to be given to how this is done and who does it.

Recent research by the Women's Resource Centre¹ highlights the ongoing need for women only services and spaces, particularly in the light of increasing pressure on 'women-only' services to justify their existence.

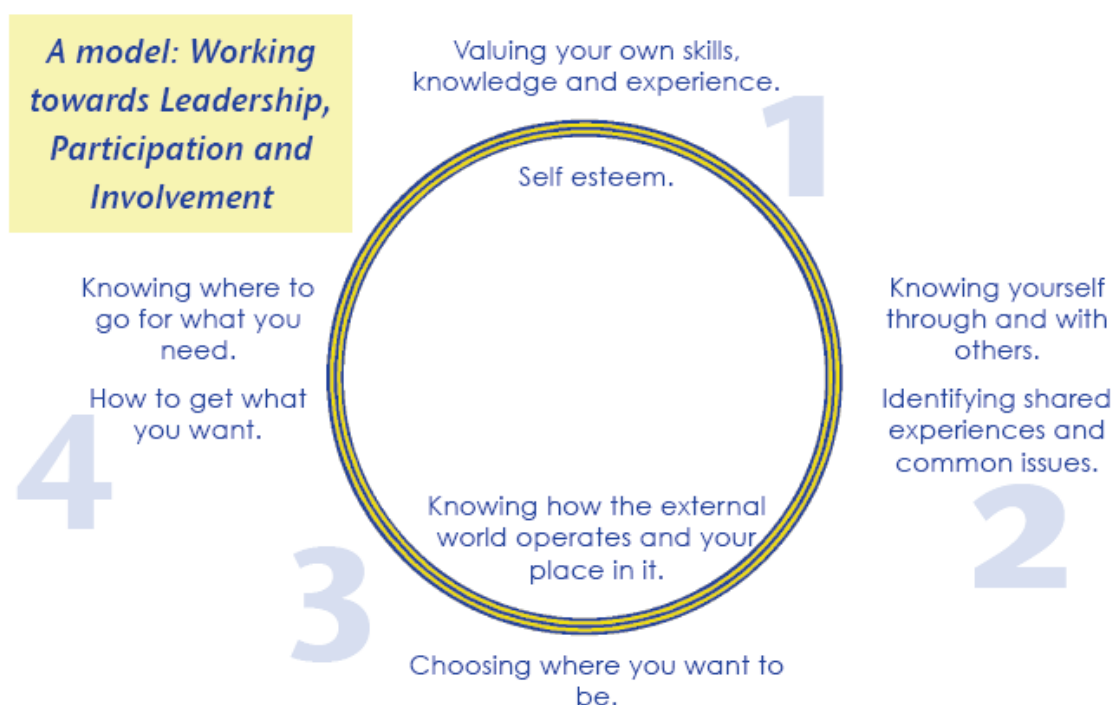
¹ Why Women-only?: The value and benefit of by women, for women services. WRC 2007 (also see www.whywomen.org.uk)

The four essential ingredients²

This model seems to have relevance for learning, development and support around 'under-represented' women being active in both community and public life. The Four Essential Ingredients suggest specific learning outcomes, which combine to create the conditions for women to be confident and active in the public domain.

1. Value your own skills

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



2. Know yourself through and with others

- Provides the opportunity to make sense of the factors that shape your life, for example, education, religion, family, motherhood, sexuality, class, race, economic dependence
- 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.

2 The Four Essential Ingredients: a model for working towards Leadership, Participation and involvement – available at www.bct.org

“I believe that my life experiences have acted as the trigger for me to strive to create a greater awareness of issues that impact upon women’s lives, and in the knowledge that women can affect change if they can develop a deeper insight into their own experiences, and that of others. Only then can you begin the process of change on a personal level, before you can begin to work on the process of change on a much wider scale.”¹

3. Know how the external world operates and choosing where you want to be

- To make changes and get our voices heard, women 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 the 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 and the roles we want to play, for example, an elected member, a school governor, an MP, a magistrate, on a Citizen’s Panel.

4. Know where to go to get what you want

- In order to make changes women have to make their voices heard, ask people for information and know how to get what they want from individuals and organisations
- This can involve negotiating, campaigning, lobbying – or simply being more assertive!
“The course sessions were delivered in a non threatening way, which made me feel safe and not judged as a group member, which was made up of a diverse group of women. This in itself broke down our feelings of isolation as we were mutually supportive of each other, our experiences were validated, and our overriding desire to take collective action inspired us to stride forth. I keep in contact with a number of the women from the course on a regular basis with whom I have developed friendships...”²

1 Extract from interview

2 Extract from interview

Characteristics of learning, support and development

This section outlines key features and characteristics

Women Only

Recent research by the Women's Resource Centre³ highlights the need for women only services and spaces, particularly in the light of increasing pressure on 'women-only' services to justify their existence and a call for gender neutral services to reflect the Gender equality Duty.

In terms of the learning programmes that we came across, women only courses are viewed as different to mixed gender courses: the group dynamics are different with many women saying that it is important in order to encourage safe spaces for experiential and personal learning. Women speak of bonding, disclosing personal histories and sharing and finding commonalities. They have the opportunity to share understand more about how power operates in terms of gender, race, class, sexuality and other aspects of people's identity and experience

"As a group of women we were able to share the richness of our lives irrespective of socio-economic status, faith, sexual orientation, age, ethnicity, disability, colour, creed, profession etc.

"We discovered that all the women on the course had suffered the same sort of inequalities and barriers."⁴

Rationale and aims

End goals of initiatives are not rigidly specified as women have to be able to choose their own levels and fields of involvement. Outcomes are geared towards more women feeling confident about being in positions where they can make a difference. There was little enthusiasm about numbers for numbers sake in all the interviews undertaken.

It is vitally important that any initiative is clear about the intended and desired outcomes. Our exploration of 'women's journeys' suggests that different 'learning' and support is helpful at different stages, and that it is important to distinguish between short term and long terms outcomes for the women involved. It is also vital to recognise the difference between 'being at the table' and being listened to and taken seriously. Experiences of running IMPACT! courses reinforces the views that have been expressed during this research process, that women may well be in 'key' positions, but still feel marginalised and appreciate ongoing learning, support and development.

3 Why Women Only? The value and benefits of by women, for women services. Women's Resource Centre, October 2007

4 Extracts from focus group

When establishing an initiative, it is important to be clear if you are....

- only 'skilling women up' to be able to fit in with existing structures
- looking for 'numbers' at any level of governance or wishing to see more women in positions of 'power'
- wanting women to feel confident about challenging and changing the status quo
- wanting gender issues to be on the agenda
- wanting women to understand more about gender and how it intersects with race, class
- The responses will help to determine the scope and approach of the initiative.

Structure of initiatives

There are a variety of structures available in terms of delivery. There are longer intensive courses (12-15 days) that run over a period of months and shorter courses – one to four days in length. Some courses are about long term personal and group development, as well as equipping women with specific skills and confidence to tackle specific issues.

Residential learning is viewed differently with some courses valuing it as time for women away from other duties and responsibilities, and others see it as a barrier to women taking part.

Courses vary in their scope and focus with some being about specific skill sets and decision making structures, and others have a broader focus on democratic rights, citizenship, power and confidence

The Councillors Commission highlighted the lack of knowledge around 'how things work', the role of councillors and how to become one, and recommended citizenship education, presentation skills and political skills training, in particular for underrepresented group. Our research endorses the value of this, and also suggests that the **barriers to learning** experienced by particular groups should be recognised.

To accredit or not to accredit?

The research came across both accredited and non accredited courses: where they are accredited, it is generally with Open College Network, (OCN), although one new initiative is working with a University on an undergraduate level course.

Issues surrounding accreditation include:

- fitting into an existing structure of units
- increased paperwork; puts some women off and encourages others
- adequate literacy levels
- increased staff time and costs
- draws down some funding – but at what cost?
- courses may be taken more seriously by women and funders
- increased time commitment for women
- making assessment accessible and creative

A lot of OCN providers use the units within the NOCN Progression Qualifications to make up accredited qualifications for lots of different uses. They can give the course their own title, but the learners gain credits towards a national qualification. This might be suitable for some women but might restrict the development of programmes that have specific outcomes.

While there are pros and cons of accreditation, some courses would not be able to attract funding if they were not accredited. This may also mean that a high percentage of participants will be required to submit assignments as a condition of continued funding.

Working from 'where women are at'

A key feature, and one which is central to a community development based approach to learning, support and development, is to work with women 'where they are at'. So, for example, several projects are running sessions that encourage women who have experienced domestic violence, to change how they view themselves and the world, supporting them to understand more about and get involved in the decision making processes that effect their lives

"The impetus for the course (2 day) – this project has existed for 12 years – it's one thing supporting women around domestic violence – but then what is there to improve women's lives – they want to make a difference"⁵

Similarities and Differences

There are courses that are aimed at women from similar cultures and backgrounds and there are courses that are aimed at mixed groups of women. It seems that both have particular benefits, depending on the needs of women at the time, the stage in their journey and the desired outcomes.

As one woman put it:

"It's easier for agencies to access white women – for Asian women there is very little support for them to be able to engage – they don't come forward so.....the essential ingredients are – language, understanding where they are coming from and the impact of this- recognising different levels of learning -- making connections and validating women's experiences – who they are....trying to understand each other.....and where we are at..... enabling Asian women to gain the skills, experiences and confidence to create an 'Asian women's voice' within the local area whenever they can"⁶

This is in the context of valuing women's skills and breaking down barriers, prejudices, assumptions between different women.

".....some Asian women are surprised when they realise that ... white women go through the same experiences of domestic violence"

5 Extract from interview

6 Extract from interview – plus following two quotes

In terms of the discussions regarding the need to continually develop a 'pool' of women to

'get involved' the DV project ..'has been going for about 12 years – if we want services to continue we need to be active – we need women to understand that'

Other courses are mixed (in terms of race, ethnicity, faith, class etc) and create opportunities for women to meet other women who are different to themselves and create connections

Funding

The annuality of funding bids can often make good initiatives short term. Organisations report feeling pressure to fit new priorities for funding purposes. The pressure to always have a **new approach** gets in the way of rolling out successful schemes and initiatives to new groups of women; the pressure to be innovative.

Recruitment

For 'open' initiatives, outreach has been undertaken to reach 'new' women and, some courses ensure that women attending can take the learning back to their organisations. Open recruitment has much to offer in encouraging 'new' women but can lead to some women feeling out of their depth and dropping out as a result. To get over this some course deliverers have a selection process and pre-course interviews. This may appear harsh, but can avoid women dropping out, possibly reinforcing low self esteem, because they didn't have the necessary language, confidence or other prerequisites. Deliverer's will try to direct women towards appropriate training – assertiveness, confidence building – if they re available.

Word of mouth is seen as crucial and a major trigger is women being encouraged by someone else or invited to attend. This factor is reflected in the findings outlined in the report on 'organisations' – that for many women, being asked or invited is a powerful motivator.

Some courses are linked to other activities that encourage women to come along – karaoke, line dancing, and massage – and consequently women make connections and feel inspired to start the course

Encouragement and Support

Support offered **during** learning programmes ranges between mentoring, one to one tutorials, learning sets, specific workshops (such as assignment support), email and phone support and group networks

Support offered **after** courses finish varies and is dependant upon the funding available but is more likely to happen when a course is delivered as part of a wider organisational commitment with staff brokering ongoing connections. This has taken the form of women's local forums, women meeting together informally, and mentoring programmes

One courses asked volunteers to support participants during and outside the course. This is more likely to be the case when a course is supported and delivered through an organisation, either statutory or voluntary.

“We set up our ‘women and citizenship forum’ during the course – runs once a month on set subject – such as Health and Social care issues, Financial Planning, Benefits et. It’s an . opportunity to discuss various issues, continue supported learning. At the first meeting the month after the course – approx 6-10 women attend. We are trying to devolve organisation of the forum to women themselves – but it’s difficult as they often drop out after couple of months. We need more time set aside to support the forum. Women have also set up their own informal network – meet pub, coffee mornings etc.”⁷

Dialogue with decision makers

Creating dialogue with decision makers is an important aspect and this might include, visits and field trips, round tables, visiting speakers, or it might involve dialogue about specific issues that women are working to change.

Such dialogue and contact can help to break down barriers and misconceptions on both sides. Many women report a better of understanding the pressures and complexities involved in taking a governance position and making personal contact with women in these positions as a motivation and inspiration.

One programme that has been developed within a CVS and is also delivered by other CVSs in different areas, has won the Goldstar Award for volunteering. The organisers are clear that involvement in developing and delivering the course has also meant they have:

“...built effective partnerships with the community sector, business sector (women mentors), local authority...”

This clearly has a knock on effect in terms of developing networks to support local women and providing opportunities for women’s voices to be heard.

It could be argued that by running such courses also serves to raise the profile of the debate around ‘women into governance’ and the need for gender issues to be ‘on the agenda’

Delivery issues

- The need for skilled facilitators who are able to manage complex group dynamics and who have conflict resolution skills
- The need for ‘representative’ trainers who relate to the experiences of the women they re working with
- The need for ‘training trainers’, both in terms of increasing the potential pool and providing more ‘representative’ trainers
- When the opportunity to learn and become familiar with IT skills are offered alongside these courses, women have found them very beneficial to source, understand and interpret information

7 Extract from interview

- A critical aspect is the opportunity to consider and explore the issues around gender, power and personal and institutional barriers to women in the community and public domain
- Provides a safe space to explore gendered roles, cultural norms and family expectations
- Controversial discussions can lead to heated discussions and require careful management and facilitation

Access and practical issues

- Course structure and timings vary, with weekends attracting different women to weekdays
- Working with translators requires time and money – whether these are spoken language translators or sign language translators
- Venues and environment are viewed as crucial – well lit, warm, comfortable with food offered
- Access is a major consideration – physical, cultural and economic
- Provision of childcare either in the form of a crèche or expenses
- Materials – creative, fun, visual, flexible, participative, jargon free
- Language is a key aspect in that some courses are geared to using a community language and this is generally when targeting women who are starting to consider a public or community role. For other courses, English is viewed as crucial as this is the medium through which public duties are carried out.
- Paying for courses is controversial; some courses are free, others charge and others have a refundable deposit. Each of these has implications for organisations running courses and potential participants.
- Funding is a problem for many reasons: re-interpreting the course and target group to fit into existing funding requirements; always got to be new innovative
- Adaptability of programmes for other marginalised groups

Holistic initiatives:

Women's organisations which exist to support individual women through a particular crisis or issue have developed their work further, to support women to challenge the policies and decisions that affect them and other women. Crisis issues include health conditions, poverty, lone parenting, domestic abuse, rape and sexual violence.

Building women's' confidence and trust is a long term process and some of the characteristics and issues raised through the research are:

- Work with women to get beyond prejudice and assumptions to encourage women see the experiences they have in common
- Act as brokers to create opportunities for women to meet and have dialogue with policy makers, service planners and providers
- Develop relationships with key local agencies and people

- Open door policy for 'new' women to contact and gain support from the organisation in the form of one to one support, advocacy, counselling, advice, group meetings, information
- Encourage and support women receiving services to get more involved in the work and life of the organisation. Increase the pool of women willing and able to continue the work of the organisation in the future
- Set up local groups to network around ongoing support and shared experiences
- Encourage and support women around increasing self esteem, self belief and expectations
- Encourage and support women to look outside their immediate circumstances and concerns and make connections with other women
- Encourage and support women to have a voice around gender and decision making
- Recognise that women have different needs which have to be met in different ways
- Bring women together in order to have a greater voice in decision making and lobbying
- Deliver training, women only events, seminars, meeting facilitation, networking events, peer mentoring
- Provide volunteering opportunities for women
- Some initiatives are restricted to particular women in particular circumstances and provide appropriate support and encouragement; this can be about language, images, validating common experiences
- Encourage women to learn English – this is a crucial part of their empowerment
- Encourage women to make a difference to their own lives and create a sense of personal agency
- Encourage and support women to progress beyond what is familiar and comfortable in safe way
- Support women to see how they can be an inspiration to others; women who understand barriers faced by women in different circumstances
- Acknowledge women's skills and how they are transferable to different contexts

Summary of programmes and initiatives

The following are brief snapshots of the organisations interviewed in this research. Detail and analysis from these interviews have been used to inform the briefing paper on Women's Learning, Support and Development.

Engender

Primarily an information, research and networking organisation for women in Scotland, Engender aims '... to increase women's power and influence; make visible the impact of sexism on women and on Scotland's social, economic and political development; and support people, organisations and our government to make equality a reality.'

Engender has been involved in discussing, debating and analysing the issues surrounding women's participation and representation in politics and public life for many years. This informs Engender's response and campaigning work. While women's representation in Parliament has been a significant priority, Engender also addresses wider aspects of women's representation and participation in all aspects of public life and decision-making, within local, regional, national and European politics, as well as in other key decision-making arenas.

Engender is currently focussing on the first decade of the Scottish Parliament and what that has meant for women, the impact of women and what the next steps should be – looking at ways of engaging women of all ages and kinds in developing these ideas, celebrating advances as well as planning to close the decision-making gap.

Engender also runs 4 day political skills courses called Engendering Change – aimed at providing women (either a paid or voluntary capacity) who want to make a difference within their organisation/community and to have their case heard and listened to by decision/policy makers, with the necessary tools and an understanding of decision making processes

The sessions focus on

- an understanding of some of the barriers to equality
- skills to put together and make their case effectively
- lobbying and campaigning skills
- skills to help them think strategically and build alliances
- confidence to take their case forward

The training draws on women's experiences of trying to make a difference, both positive and negative, and participants identify a real issue/area where they want to make a difference before the course starts.

www.engender.org.uk

Fawcett Society

The Fawcett Society, UK's leading campaign for gender equality, promotes women's **economic, political, social** and **bodily rights** by campaigning for legislative change, influencing practice, and empowering individuals to effect change at a grassroots level.

Recent successes range from a change in the law to allow political parties to use all-women shortlists to increase the number of women MPs, to a new, fairer system for appointing judges, to a new duty on public bodies to promote equality between women and men.

As well as having individual members and subscribers, Fawcett receives funding from charitable trusts, foundations and other sponsors.

Fawcett runs a variety of campaigns including:

- *Keeping Mum* on the penalty of motherhood
- *femocracy* on ethnic minority women and politics
- *Seeing Double* promoting the diverse needs and interests of ethnic minority women
Sexism and the City Equal Power 2028
- “This is what a feminist looks like!” public campaign

Fawcett has recently published a collection of essays on the needs of ethnic minority women called ‘Seeing Double: Race and gender in ethnic minority women’s lives’. The essays build the evidence base on the experiences of ethnic minority women in making their needs visible.

Fawcett will soon publish ‘Routes to Power’, a unique research study that tracks the trajectories of ethnic minority women who are currently active in decision-making positions to learn how they have navigated into their roles. The research includes focus groups with local councillors, women in public governance positions, and pioneering women at the grassroots; and interviews with senior decision-makers across the private, public, and voluntary sectors.

For more information on ‘Seeing Double: Race and gender in ethnic minority women’s lives’ or ‘Routes to Power’ contact zohra moosa, zohra.moosa@fawcettsociet.org.uk, 020 7253 2598

Women's Resource Centre

Is a charity which supports women's organisations to be more effective and sustainable. WRC provides training, information, resources and one-to-one support on a range of organisational development issues. We also lobby decision makers on behalf of the women's not-for-profit sector for improved representation and funding. The WRC's 'why women?' campaign calls on the Government to acknowledge that women continue to face systematic discrimination because of their gender and adequately fund women's organisations to address this issue. Recent research publications include 'Where are the women in LPSs?' and 'The Crisis in Rape Crisis' and makes the case for women-only spaces and services in 'why women-only'.

WRC's members work in a wide range of fields delivering services to and campaigning on behalf of some of the most marginalised communities of women. There are over ten thousand people working or volunteering for member organisations who support almost half a million individuals each year.

www.wrc.org.uk

Fair Play Partnership: Aspire course

The FPP used to run women into public life courses targeted at communities until the funding was discontinued. Their current programme is called Aspire is a 2 day course based in Leeds that supports women and provides the time and space for them to think how they can move forward in the workplace and public life. It is targeted at women wanting to develop leadership skills in the private, voluntary and public sectors at all level. It combines personal development with an understanding of the dynamics of Boards and decision making. Whilst the courses are flexible to meet the needs to each group, Aspire encourages women to recognise common experiences as well as differences; encourages women to work together. The course content is flexible with a focus on understanding personal and institutional barriers that prevent women from being where they want to be. There is a fee for doing the course and some employers pay for their staff to do it. The challenge is for women to give two days to themselves and many women report only deciding to do the course when others have encouraged them to apply. FPP is an independent and non profit making organisation.

www.fairplaypartnership.org.uk

Richmond CVS: Women in Governance (WinG) course

Women in Governance, (WinG), started in 2003. It is a partnership programme managed by Richmond upon Thames Council for Voluntary Services (RCVS), a charity company limited by guarantee, working with Kingston Voluntary Action and Merton Voluntary Services Council. RCVS, KVA, and MVSC work with their membership to provide specialist skills, knowledge, resources and training to voluntary and community organisations. WinG is an inclusive programme that encourages and supports women in the three boroughs to take part in local democracy. It enables women, particularly those from black and minority ethnic communities, those with a disability, and other socially excluded groups, to achieve an accredited qualification and take on roles as volunteer community decision makers on charity trustee boards, school governing bodies, and within local authorities and primary care trusts.

The project has built an effective network of partnership arrangements with BME, refugee, disability, carer and lone parent support organisations to enable a grassroots recruitment campaign to be implemented. The project is made attractive to women with no qualifications by having approved learning provider status from the Open College Network, and policies to support learners from all backgrounds. The project also tackles language barriers for those from ethnic minority and refugee communities through the use of volunteer translators.

Recruitment success is highlighted by the number of volunteers recruited being ahead of the original planned delivery schedule for the Project. A key element is the delivery of high quality training and induction. WinG has developed training units “Power and Diversity” and “Effective Local Governance” that have been accredited by the Open College Network. This offers external confirmation of the quality of the training provided and national recognition of the volunteers’ achievements. 35% of volunteers have gained the accredited qualification through the WinG training. Volunteers are also given IT training by a specialist IT trainer who is an integral part of the WinG team, with all completing the sessions gaining accreditation through OCN or Learn Direct. Nearly 86% of the volunteers rate the training as excellent.

Ultimately the success of the Project is measured by the numbers of volunteers that go on to serve on the various local governance bodies. In addition to the high quality training provided, ongoing support is provided through, for example, one-to-one meetings with Project staff and the provision of external mentors where needed to boost confidence. There are tailored advice sessions to identify progression pathways and suitable roles, as well as the ongoing support needs of each volunteer, with guidance and support available to local organisations to ensure that best practice is adopted in the involvement of participants. As part of its work WinG is also producing a Good Practice Guide to Diversity in Governance, with a particular focus on the role of women on governing bodies. They have been given the Gold Star Award for volunteering. By the end of 2007, over 200 women had completed 12 courses.

For more information contact:

Louise Ivison, wing@richmondcsvs.org.uk

www.richmondcsvs.org.uk

Impact!

IMPACT! grew out of a women's health project when the focus moved from running workshops on 'dealing with the menopause' and 'how to be mother and stay sane' to working out how we, as women, can influence the decisions that affect our lives. It evolved from a series of workshops around women and leadership which by 1998 had expanded to include a programme of training, practical support and mentoring. The first accredited 'course' of this type began in January 2000 and it focused on women's own experiences and opinions whilst setting out to explore local, national and European decision making structures.

Another strand of work, funded through the Barrow Cadbury Trust in 2002, led to critical reflections on the political, social and economic contexts affecting women's development agendas, leadership and women's organisations.

We felt that vision, excitement and commitment were needed more than ever to encourage and motivate ourselves and other women to organise to make a difference around 'women' and gender and to cut across the fragmentation, competition and individualism we saw operating in many women's organisations and initiatives at the time. We gained funding from a variety of sources – Health Action Zones, National Lottery, Barrow Cadbury Trust – to develop our ideas around women becoming more active in community and public life – through using a community development approach which counters the notion of elevating a few women as community leaders to talk on behalf of others and engage with civic structures as a token voice for women.

The success of the pilot courses led to further developments around the main topics of citizenship, democracy, leadership and participation and to an invitation by the Home Office Active Learning for Active Citizenship (ALAC) programme to showcase the IMPACT! approach as a creative learning initiative (2004-6).

IMPACT! was a participative training course nested within a network offering encouragement, skill-sharing, information and support. It was a place and a space for women to meet, share, learn, grow, get involved and, hopefully, to encourage other women to get involved. It was 'women only' as the dynamics and interaction within a 'women only' space are very different from the dynamics when there are men present. This 'Women only' space offered an opportunity to move beyond the usual gender dynamics.

IMPACT! challenged the notions 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.

Delivering the programme

The programme was a mix of workshops, residential events, field visits, events and support sessions running over a 6-9 month period, depending upon the nature of the group. The Impact sessions ran on Saturdays as this was preferred by the participants – other courses in the past had run on weekdays. There were two field visits; to the English parliament and to the European parliament. In previous years we have held what is called ‘round table’ events, where women who are active in public and community life come to share their stories with other women. There were two weekend residentials where women were encouraged not to bring children but were given childcare costs instead.

Accreditation

The course was accredited with the Open College Network with four units:

- Participation and leadership
- Citizenship and human rights
- Introduction to democracy and decision making
- Assertiveness

There was also the option of a ‘taster unit’, which was a separate unit for those who had to miss out parts of the course. This unit covered elements of the four units above but with less detail.

All the units were available at level 1, 2 and 3 and the assignments could be written or spoken. We provided paper or electronic versions of the worksheets and questions and guidelines on what was needed in order to achieve the various levels.

There was the option of having tutorials and we offered two tutorials per participant. They were also asked to keep a course diary.

For more information, contact:

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www.takepart.org.uk

www.changesuk.net.uk

Sparkbrook Caribbean and African Women's Development Initiative (SCAWDI)

Founded in 1997, SCAWDI emerged as a response to the exclusion of Black women from local decision making processes in their community. SCAWDI is a voluntary organisation, specialising in community development and delivering services across a broad range. We work through women as drivers of change, creating opportunities and equipping women with the skills and resources that enable them to effect change at grass roots level.

SCAWDI has a network of over 100 women (volunteers), giving women an increasingly powerful local voice.

SCAWDI's founder is currently trying to develop a course, in conjunction with a local university – a practical 'hands on' community based course, 'Women, Leadership and Politics'. The course aims to equip women with the practical skills & resources they will need to enter into local politics.

The aim is to demystify the political process, unpack the 'protocols and frameworks' and provide an entry route into politics. It will be accredited at undergraduate level and delivered at community venues over a 12 month period. It is targeted at women from a wide range of backgrounds who are already active in their communities, although many are unlikely to be affiliated to a political party. By equipping women with the key, core skills and knowledge and rules of engagement, they will be able to make informed choices and 'hold their own' in a political context. SCAWDI believe this is a critical part of the process, to avoid being 'picked off' one by one, or worse, set up to fail.

In terms of content the course will include current affairs, political and legal systems, representation, governance and a thorough grounding in local government; broad brush themes will range from 'the importance of different perspectives to cultures, people and participation'.

Ultimately, it is about taking passionate and committed women, already active at grass roots level, equipping them with requisite skills and moving them on, seamlessly, to the next level.

SCAWDI is a black women's initiative which recognises the importance of bringing different people together and working together across race, ethnicity and gender to achieve common goals within a local area.

For more details contact

[Barbara Willis-Brown](#)

0121 440 4873

Apna Haq Project

The Apna Haq project offers support for Asian women and children facing domestic violence issues, raising issues facing Asian women to ensure that agencies respond appropriately and enabling Asian women to gain the skills, experiences and confidence to create an 'Asian women's voice' within the Rotherham whenever they can.

Their first 2 day Women into Leadership course has just been piloted – targeted at women who have had contact with the project. The rationale is around women improving their lives and making a difference – gaining a level of power and control in a situation, self belief and taking small steps to a bigger goal. The course is centred on the five key themes of the Every Child Matters initiative and explores the role of public agencies and themselves in making improvements. These 5 areas are:

- Be healthy
- Stay safe
- Enjoy and achieve
- Make a positive contribution
- Achieve economic well-being

The course explores obstacles to participation as well as those instances when women have made their voices heard. Participants are encouraged to get involved in the Women's Strategy in Rotherham and find a common voice with other women. It is targeted at Muslim women from different communities and operates bilingually. Underpinning the whole project is the commitment to valuing women's skills and breaking down barriers between different women. This project is part of the GROW network in Rotherham.

www.apnahaq.itz3.net

GROW Organisation

GROW is an independent Charity whose mission is to provide a unique holistic service to enable women and their families in Rotherham to make informed choices. In 2006 GROW was commissioned to develop and maintain a Women's Network for Rotherham. GROW believes that progress for women will be very slow unless there are changes in the practices and philosophies of decision makers. To address this GROW has developed relationships with a range of strategic and operational networks and agencies.

Rotherham Women's Network: supporting and representing the views and aspirations of all Rotherham Women

Prior to the development of the Rotherham Women's Network there was no co-ordinated approach to ensuring Rotherham women's involvement in the embedding of the priorities outlined in Rotherham's Community Strategy and other key strategies. The profile of Rotherham women showed a picture similar to that of women across the country. However the research data shows that Rotherham women have identified the labour market, education, housing and health as their main areas of concern. RWN believes women should be able to become involved in decision-making and that there should be equality of access to services, therefore the aim of the network is to ensure Rotherham women are:

- Included in the drive to tackle and further reduce inequalities;
- Involved in the equalities and cohesion objectives;
- Engaged and involved in the development of volunteering;
- Able to have more influence in decision making and service delivery;
- Involved in influencing service improvement;
- Able to have a real say in the health of themselves, their families and the community.

Network terms of reference

- To provide a supportive environment to meet
- To discuss issues affecting women;
- To facilitate women's development that will support women to engage in decision making in their community and within the borough;
- To identify equalities issues that are experienced by women in Rotherham.

Current issues identified

The current issues identified are as a result of the Profile of Rotherham Women (2006) and consultations carried out in the development of the Rotherham Women's Strategy:

- Access to education/training
- Employment issues
- Childcare and caring responsibilities
- Town centre access
- Transport
- Crime and safety
- Health
- Positive images of women
- Equality issues
- Women having a 'voice'
- Access to leisure and social activities

www.growproject.org.uk

Gender and Participation Unit (GAP)

The GAP unit is part of Manchester Metropolitan University. One main stream of their work is coordinating and delivering gender and self-esteem workshops for groups of women which aim to give women confidence to engage with civic decision-making. The workshops (one-off sessions or a series of three sessions) use participatory, community education methodology which develops personal skills in women as well as looking at reasons for gender inequality and how to tackle it at different levels. They also deliver gender awareness courses for mixed community, voluntary and public sector groups, focussing on the need for gender-balanced participation. They are training a pool of people to deliver future training and to be able to devise their own programmes.

They get to know the groups beforehand or have co-facilitators who have links to the relevant community they are working with and they illustrate points using local and or contemporary data. This helps to create interest and lend credibility. Sharing food before or after workshops is important and activities are varied to keep people's interest. The courses introduce theoretical concepts as well as personalising the issues.

gapunit@mmu.ac.uk

Centre for Women and Democracy (CFWD)

CFWD is an independent non partisan organisation based in the north of England which works to increase the representation of women at all levels of public life, and particularly as part of the electoral process. It commissions, carries out and publishes research and reports on women in public life and holds a variety of events to promote the representation of women from all communities and backgrounds and provide women with the information, tools and confidence to enter (and remain in) public life. They facilitate networking and exchange of good practice to develop a wider understanding of the issues.

www.cfwd.org.uk

Telephone 0113 234 6500

Email info@cfwd.org.uk

WAITS (Women Active in Today's Society)

WAITS is a women's educational charity established in 1992 concerned with local women's fuller involvement in the public life of their communities, from education to employment, personal to social and leadership to decision making. They support women to address issues such as welfare benefits, employment and education, domestic violence, isolation, health, crime and the fear of crime and many more. Often women become involved in other ways after their first contact with WAITS. "*Women with the power to make and influence decisions and make positive change*". Although WAITS prioritises working with Black women, there is a recognition that women need to work across their differences in order to effect change. They are involved in developing a policy forum, connecting women and policy makers, which fits with their role as a broker, a conduit of information and communication.

The Capacity Builders' project and the Rules of Engagement project aims to strengthen the voices of BME women and groups in Birmingham, (plus other under-represented women) enable them to identify issues of concern and build their capacity and develop their ability to engage with policy makers and create policy solutions. They deliver training workshops, hold regular women only events, provide a citywide peer mentoring scheme, and facilitate meetings with decision makers. In 2004 they conducted research with local women about their attitudes to and involvement in local decision making. Results showed a general perception that women were not involved and confused about what opportunities were available to them. During 2005 – 2006 WAITS held community consultation across the city about devolution and getting involved in local decision making. Key barriers were communication, education and support, practicalities of attending meetings, confidence and respect.

www.waitsaction.org

WEA W@W Project

The WEA Scotland's Women@Work (W@W) Project is a Highland-wide women's network, which provides information, learning and support for working women (paid and unpaid). The Project helps women to understand issues, develop skills and become more able to speak out about things that matter to them at home, at work and in the community.

W@W provides

- lunchtime and evening meetings in seven areas of the Highlands
- networking opportunities
- newsletters
- conferences
- training days
- W@W E-bulletin
- consultation
- participation
- opportunities for members to publicise their businesses

W@W aims at providing a forum to exchange ideas and opinions and to support women to share common experiences, while growing in confidence and making new contacts. Their aim is for women to become active citizens rather than token women and they are exploring equality issues in public appointments in Scotland. They also run laughter workshops for women!!!

www.weawomenatwork.org.uk

Muslim Women's Network

The Muslim Women's Network (MWN-UK) is an independent national network of individual Muslim women and Muslim women's organisations across the UK, aiming to:

- Provide a channel between Muslim women and the government through which MWN-UK will bring the diverse views of Muslim women on issues of importance to them, and ensure they are involved in national policy and decision-making processes relevant to their lives.
- Provide a platform for Muslim women to network and share knowledge, skills and experiences on a wide range of issues and by working together to bring about positive change in their lives and in their communities.
- Raise the profile of Muslim women's groups and Muslim women role models.
- Ensure the Government and the Muslim community recognises the fantastic work being done at grass roots level by many Muslim women's organisations.

The network holds meetings, conducts research and consultations, shares good practice and disseminates relevant information and provides channel through which individual Muslim women and groups may link with each other across the UK.

The MWN-UK vision is of "...a society where Muslim women can have an effective voice and the opportunity to contribute equally to wider society." and this requires:

- Empowering Muslim women
- Recognising the diversity within the Muslim community
- Encouraging the equality of Muslim women
- Valuing opinions of Muslim women at the grassroots

www.mwnuk.co.uk

contact@mwnuk.co.uk

National Muslim Women's Advisory group

The National Muslim Women's Advisory group (NMWAG) was formally launched by the Prime Minister and is led by 19 Muslim women representing a wide spectrum of communities, professions and traditions. They are discussing issues and concerns that affect Muslim women, including education, employment, access for women to mosques and their management committees and cultural barriers including issues around forced marriages.

NMWAG comprises of a group of women who are in positions of leadership or are working with communities. They will meet several times a year and are an independent informal group advising on issues to empower Muslim women and increase their participation in civic, economic and social life. NMWAG has been set up by Communities and Local Government as part of its work to prevent violent extremism.

For more information contact
shareefa.fulat@communities.gsi.gov.uk

FATIMA Network

FATIMA Women's Network is an independent, strategic and diverse organisation, using dynamic interventions for gender equity and social and environmental justice advocating on a range of issues affecting women and their families, including migration, culture, faith and enterprise. In the past year FATIMA has participated and made presentations in Rome, Vienna, Kuala Lumpur, Kuwait, Lisbon, Brussels and Bulgaria.

Since helping to establish the European Migrant Women's Network in January 2007 FATIMA has provided the secretariat and strategic direction. At the 53rd Session on the Commission on the Status of Women at the United Nations, they launched their report "Global Issues-Local Voices: Effective Use of International Instruments & Agencies" which surveyed over a hundred international organizations working with women.

To mark 2008 as the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue major conferences are planned under their Fem EU-Link banner, including events jointly held at the Wales Millennium Centre and the Welsh Assembly; at the Civic Centre in Lisburn, Northern Ireland; as part of the three day world Civicus Gathering at the Scottish Conference Centre in Glasgow; and finally at De Montfort University Post Graduate Business School with Phil Hope MP, Minister of the Third Sector and Minister of the East Midlands Region.

FATIMA is funded by Capacity Builders, to deliver infrastructure support to Black Minority Ethnic women's organisations across the East Midlands focussing on capacity building, sustainability, policy, development and networking. The Network also sits on the Executive of the national Black infrastructure partnership Voice4Change.

FATIMA's Chief Executive, Parvin Ali OBE is also a member of the National Muslim Women's Advisory Group

info@fatima-network.com

www.fatima-network.com

0845 331 2373

Wigan Domestic Violence Project

The Refuge has developed a survivors' network to encourage women to engage and get involved in tenants and residents' associations and borough wide community networks. They run workshops with women around changing how they view themselves and the world – and this includes aspects of basic skills and IT. A resource centre supports women once they are re-housed and established within the wider community. The project also delivers life skills, basic skills and personal development through participation and involvement in the Tenants and Residents groups, neighbourhood forums, townships and thematic partnerships of the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) structure. Their successful supporting people project focused on encouraging women to get involved in the decision making processes that effect their lives and, *'it is all onward and upward for these projects as they continue to promote and support women throughout the process from down trodden victim to involved, participative community and socially engaged and interactive representative.'*

For more information contact: 01942 262270/262290

South West Foundation

The Foundation runs a small grants programme supporting community organisations working with people most in need in the rural areas of the South West Region and has a strong interest in working with women who are involved in small Voluntary and Community Sector organisations. The Foundation also undertakes research that supports the sector and recently published Funders' Footprints looking at the experiences of these small community organisations in accessing funding and funding advice.

The Foundation recognises the innovative and inventive ways which women tackle issues in their communities and their dedication and investment in issues that are important to them? Many women are undertaking this work in their communities for little or no financial reward and are heavily involved in the governance of small groups. However, in the course of its own activities, the Foundation has noticed the under representation of women at decision making level and policy making groups. It has also noticed how when women are present they often contribute less at these meetings or have considerable less of the 'floor time'.

The Foundation decided to test out some of its observations and has informally interviewed women involved in communities about that involvement, what led them to remain involved and why they have not taken part in what is considered higher level activities in communities. These focus groups were supported by Women Take Part and the findings have contributed to the research around women's involvement in governance.

For more information contact Jan Crawley
e-mail jcrawley@southwestfoundation.org.uk
Tel 01275 333666

National Black Women's Network

The NBWN is a non-profit organisation dedicated to raising the status and position of black women in all walks of life.

The network provide dynamic initiatives, enabling women from diverse backgrounds and occupations to develop strong professional and social contacts; high quality training and education programmes; leadership and national recognition.

It works to ensure that the contributions and influence of black women are recognised as vital forces within the public and private sector, business, corporate, arts, media and entertainment fields.

For more information contact:
sonia@nbwn.org

FE Women's Leadership Network

The remit of the Women's Leadership Network is to provide professional support to women leaders working within the further education system.

Their mission is to:

- promote and represent the interests and aspirations of women in FE by influencing leadership thinking and policy
- encourage career progression by supporting women managers to pursue leadership roles and work to improve support for women in the workplace
- provide professional support and intelligence networks for women leaders in FE
- raise awareness of the under-representation of women in FE leadership
- be recognised as a source of good professional practice.

www.wlnfe.org.uk

Open College Network

A trawl of the OCN database for current accredited programmes and units relating to 'women into public life' produced little. They have recently archived programmes that haven't run for the last two years, so there may have been programmes running a number of years ago that have been archived.

There are some local units on Governance and Citizenship and Management Committee Training that have been delivered to general groups. Unison has two relevant courses that are OCN approved and usually delivered by WEA: Women, Work and Society and Women's Learning Programme.

A lot of their providers now use the units within the NOCN Progression Qualifications to make up accredited qualifications for lots of different uses. They can give the course their own title in the same way an OCN programme is usually set up, but the learners gain credits towards a national qualification. Unfortunately it's much more difficult to report on these as they are classified differently on the database.

Initiatives which were not interviewed

South Yorkshire Women's Development Trust

The South Yorkshire Women's Development Trust was launched in April 2002 to provide mutual support, resources and funding opportunities for women's organisations across South Yorkshire. It is an organisation run by Women for Women and groups that work with or for women in the South Yorkshire area.

The Trust works with a diverse range of organisations across South Yorkshire and actively promotes networking and training opportunities for women.

www.sywdt.org

South Yorkshire Women on Line

An interactive web site for women in South Yorkshire – South Yorkshire Women's Development Trust welcomes you to the latest initiative One Click Away. The web site is a fantastic new resource for women across the region, providing a level playing field on which women can find information, express their views and get questions answered.

www.sywol.org

Inspire Black Country

Inspire is an independent organisation committed to promoting the interests of women and supporting women's organisations the Black Country in all aspects of public policy and life. It aims to encourage women, in particular marginalised women, to find their voice and participate in local decision making and to reflect women's experiences and views in order to influence change. Inspire supports the four Black Country Boroughs Women's Forums to develop their engagement in strategic decision making and the empowerment of local women's groups.

[Website under construction](#)