

CASE STUDY: Informal Health Engagement in Tunbridge Wells

Building local public sector community engagement capacity

About

Involve worked with Tunbridge Wells Borough Council to design and deliver an informal and fun community participation event and to train NHS and Council staff in community engagement. This event was part of the Local Government Improvement and Development Healthy Communities Programme which aims at helping local governments improve the health of local communities.

Background

The new health and wellbeing powers of local government are a new and challenging area of work. The traditional top-down consultation methods, such as surveys and feedback forms, have proven inadequate in engaging with communities, especially those from poorer neighbourhoods who consume a disproportionate amount of health resources. The Council felt the need to pursue different engagement strategies to establish what local people felt about health issues.

Purpose

The main purpose of the project was to improve how the Council and Primary Care Trust engaged around health and health improvement; in particular around understanding the poorer communities' health needs.

The intended outcomes were:

- To assess what the barriers to a healthy lifestyle are
- To build the skills of NHS and council staff around public engagement



Name of project:

Informal Health Engagement in Tunbridge Wells

Type of project:

Embedding public engagement in government

Date:

2010

Partners:

West Kent Primary Care Trust, Tunbridge Wells Borough Council and Local Government Improvement and Development

Contact details:

Edward Andersson
Edward@involve.org.uk

Links to relevant sources:

Not another consultation!
<http://www.idea.gov.uk/idk/aio/24856309>

About Involve:

Involve believes that honest and open dialogue between citizens and government strengthens democracy, helps make better decisions and leads to more innovative and efficient public services. We work with government, elected representatives and civil society organisations to open new channels for dialogue at all levels of government and society.

Project Activities

Involve developed the **planning and design** for a participative community event in collaboration with the Council. Involve ran a half **day training session** for staff members at Tunbridge Wells Borough Council and West Kent PCT. Training built on practical facilitation and engagement skills needed for the upcoming event.

The event was held in the TN2 Community Centre in Sherwood, Tunbridge Wells. Many different enjoyable activities, such as face painting and jewellery making ran alongside participative activities, giving the event an informal and fun atmosphere. The nature and time of the event, being on a Saturday, allowed for a high turnout, as it allowed people to drop in and out according to their own schedule and inclination. A variety of engagement activities were used:

- Participants **voted** on top health problems by dropping glass counters into **jars**
- A **Graffiti Wall** allowed for the drawing of perceived hindrances to health living
- **Themed Discussions** on specific topics were written on flip charts
- A **Resolution Space** allowed for participants to commit to health actions that they would take in the new year
- **Video diaries** allowed for the recording of “thought pieces” of living in Sherwood
- An informal **Cafe Discussion** allowed for small groups to discuss considerations on health issues in greater detail

“The Council [...] are pleased with the portfolio of creative skills and practical techniques brought to the project by Involve” –Richard Powell, Director of Services to the Community Tunbridge Wells Council



For more information on this project or the work Involve does, please contact us.

Involve
Royal London House
22 – 25 Finsbury Square
London
EC2A 1DX

Tel: +44 (0) 207 920 6470
Email: info@involve.org.uk
Web: www.involve.org.uk

Front page image: Graffiti Wall
Above image: Jar Voting

Results

The event at the TN2 centre was well attended and generated positive feedback on both the enjoyable activities and the local choice of venue. It fostered the development of new relationships as a wide variety of public sector organisations worked together to engage with and provide advice to the public. As a result, the partners gained a better understanding of the community’s self perceptions of critical health problems. Subjective citizen views were compared to hard data available on health inequalities, identifying some interesting areas where the two forms of data were out of sync.

The event also exposed the council and NHS West Kent staff to different ways of carrying out public engagement approaches which can be used across the organisations’ services. A written report of the results from the day was submitted to the council. The methodology has since been replicated elsewhere.

involve