'It's broken the ice both ways': Community Conferencing in East Manchester

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May 2004

CAEC

Community Audit & Evaluation Centre

Contents

Acknowledgments

Summary

A Community Conferencing Project running in East Manchester from February 2002 – June 2004, managed by Victim Support and funded through New Deal for Communities, one of the funding partners in New East Manchester "Beacons for a Brighter Future"

Community Conferencing brings people and agencies in communities together to resolve conflicts. It is based on Restorative Justice principles and mediation and uses a structured approach and problem-solving methods, which focus on solutions.

In the 27 months covered by this audit, 27 referrals were made to the project and 12 volunteers recruited as facilitators. The project had a part-time co-ordinator; two people were appointed to this post during the life of the project.

The audit considered the processes and outcomes of the project and identified what was unique about the project, lessons learned, and options for the way forward. The two coordinators, developed different ways of running working on cases. This provides alternative models for a future project, which are described and appraised.

The audit included analysis of project documentation and discussion with over 40 people who had some connection to the project, including young people, older residents, project staff, volunteers and workers from partner agencies. Discussions involved an audit of the project and options of how the work should be developed.

The Community Conferencing scheme in Heywood was also visited. The Heywood scheme has been running for 14 months and is better resourced including having a full-time worker. The project has had 70 referrals and includes 21 volunteers.

The conclusions of the audit include that there is widespread support for a continuation of Community Conferencing in East Manchester. The opportunity to bring people together especially from different generations using problem solving methods to address conflict in the community was valued by conference participants and stake holding agencies using the models adopted by both co-ordinators. Routinely collected information was limited. Partly because Community Conferencing is relatively new and as practice develops, appropriate ways of monitoring will become clearer. This meant information of cost effectiveness was limited. Indications are however that the project may have been under-resourced and that a larger project may be more cost-effective. This method of solving conflicts in communities was not offered by any other organisation in the area and participants would like continued access to it.

It is recommended that funding be sought for a project including a full-time worker and administrative support, based in an office within the project area. The role of the post holder should be to develop and run the service and to

explore potential for mainstream funding for the longer term. Given that community conferencing is new, the project should be encouraged to be innovative in order to develop good practice. Throughout the next phase an independent evaluation should run to ensure reflective practice, development of more appropriate indicators to evaluate community conferencing and wider sharing of the learning from the projects work. In addition the report makes detailed specific recommendations following each section.

The audit

The audit has focussed around the following questions.
• What if anything is unique about Community Conferencing in the area?
• What lessons have been learnt through the course of the Community Conferencing project?

It has provided an opportunity to:
- document the processes and outcomes of the Community Conferencing project
- find out what difference stakeholders felt the Community Conferencing programme had made to the area
- find out participants opinions about valuable aspects of the programme and how they might be taken forward.

In order to address these questions the following activities were undertaken:

1. A search of information on community conferencing and restorative justice was undertaken on the web and academic journals, and appropriate documents and articles read to provide an understanding of:
   1. what has been written about community conferencing and restorative justice
   2. the policy context of the project.
   3. The principles and processes involved
2. Review of project documentation
3. Discussions with over 40 people about their views of the project and suggestions for what should be carried forward and how including:
   - 8 key stakeholders
   - Participant observation of a conference
   - 2 focus groups, one involving 4 residents, and the other 11 young people who attended a community conference
   - telephone interviews with 12 people who attended 2 case conferences
   - follow up interviews with 6 conference participants
   - telephone interviews with 4 locals residents who had had involvement in the project as volunteers, potential volunteers, steering group members and as residents active with bodies addressing crime in the area.
   - the coordinator & evaluator of Heywood community conferencing project
   4. As information was collected it was fedback to the project co-ordinator to promote reflective practice.

The degree to which a participatory approach was possible was limited by the way the proposal was developed and breadth of the evaluation agreed, limitations of funding and therefore time and the degree to which there were participative structures within the project.

What is community conferencing?

Restorative Justice

Community conferencing is based on restorative justice principles. Understanding of restorative justice can be diverse (Home Office, undated). A description, which applies well to community conferencing as it was developed in East Manchester is:

> *'a problem solving approach to crime which involves the parties themselves and the community generally, in an active relationship with statutory agencies'* (Marshall, 1999)

Restorative Justice is a more participative and potentially empowering approach to justice than legalistic approaches:

> '*Those who have been affected talk about the impact of the crime, instead of professionals in the criminal justice system talking for them*' *(Restorative Justice Consortium, undated)*

The exclusion of those directly affected by crime by the legal system is associated with high levels of fear of crime and lack of confidence by the community in the legal system's ability to control it. Restorative Justice offers social as well as legal justice by involving victims and communities in the treatment of offenders.(Pollard, 2000 & Marshall, 1999)

Research (Youth Justice Board for England and Wales, undated) on restorative justice have indicated effectiveness in the following areas

- Victims
    - high levels of satisfaction and sense of fairness (even where mediation is not face to face)
    - Reduction of fear especially in re-victimisation by the offender
- Offenders
    - rates of re-offending are at least as low and lower in many cases
    - more powerful impact and high levels of agreement are reached through face to face meetings
    - completion and compliance of agreements are higher than for court orders
    - offenders have high level of satisfaction and sense of fairness

There has been relatively little research on community impact and involvement but:
> *'The involvement of local communities has potential benefits in increasing understanding, empowering local people, enhancing appropriate social control and modelling and reducing fear of crime.'* *(Youth Justice Board for England and Wales, undated)*

This audit contributes to knowledge of community impact and points to areas worthy of further research.

Community Conferencing

Community Conferencing in East Manchester is one of 5 schemes currently being piloted nationally as part of Neighbourhood Renewal Unit work focussing on conflict resolution and community facilitation in areas experiencing tensions (Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, undated).

Community conferencing encourages people to listen to one another in a safe and structured environment, and everyone to be taken seriously. The aim is to encourage empathy and constructive action to address the future needs of the community (Liddle, 2002). As well as bringing the different parties in a conflict together, a community conference involves people who may be able to support those parties. Like the parties in a dispute, this may involve local residents of all ages and other organisations with an interest in the area. **Where Community Conferencing differs from other types of Restorative Justice is that it does not focus around people who have acknowledged committing an offence, it is not about allocating blame or seeking retribution (Liddle, 2002).**

While conferencing demands particularly skilled facilitators, it

> *'is a potentially more powerful tool that one to one mediation, because it allows social resources to be brought to bear to ensure the offender's change of heart is more likely to continue. While still addressing the victim's needs, it also addresses those of the offender – and of society . . .'* **(Marshall, 1999, p14).**

Community conferencing is new and evolving. Thames Valley Police developed a training course for the first cohort of facilitators. Coordinators of projects were expected to develop local training from this. Community Conferencing is a complex process which involves 3 main phases; preparation, facilitation of a formal conference and follow up and evaluation (Liddle, 2002). Frequently problems are resolved in the preparatory phase and a formal conference is not held. The conference itself is for people who have been involved in the preparatory work (Liddle, 2002). At the end of the conferences participants may sign an agreement. Practice Standards have been written for facilitators and managers of restorative conference services (Thames Valley Police, 1999). The methods used are based on mediation; the facilitators support the participants to identify their own solutions.

Community conferencing offers an alternative to **official or legal action. With a legal approach, offenders do not have to account for their actions and victims have no status except as 'givers of evidence' and can feel like bystanders (Restorative Justice Consortium, undated, and Pollard, 2000).**

All parties are treated with respect and without discrimination. There is no pressure to take part or maintain involvement and confidentiality is

offered to people who approach the project for support. (Community Conferencing, undated)

Community Conferencing in East Manchester; an overview

Community Conferencing in East Manchester covers the area of New Deal for Communities East (NDC) which is Openshaw, Clayton, Beswick and W. Gorton. The NDC applied for the funding and is a key stake holding agency. The project has been managed by and based within Victim Support, City of Manchester. The overall funding for the project was £71,800 (East Manchester New Deal for Communities, 2001). The project was coordinated by a part-time paid member of staff and involved (trained) volunteers as facilitators.

The East Manchester scheme aims to:

- Reduce neighbour nuisance and anti-social behaviour
- Encourage communication between older and younger generations
- Improve relationships in the community

(Community Conferencing, undated)

The target outputs for the East Manchester project was 14 conferences and involving 140 people, including 60 young people. Recorded contacts on 27 referrals involved 204 people including 46 young people. 96 of the adults were residents or ran local businesses. They included 42 parents. The other adults were from local agencies. These figures indicate that the number of people reached by the project were similar to those in the initial proposal.

The first part-time coordinator for the project began setting up the project in February 2002. Four volunteers and the coordinator attended a 5 day residential training course in April 2002 which was run by Thames Valley Police specifically for staff and volunteers for the 5 pilot projects. The first referrals were received in May 2002 and the first conference was held in the following July. The first coordinator left in November 2003 and was replaced by a second coordinator. The first coordinator worked with a steering group that met regularly and a small volunteer group. The role of volunteers as facilitators increased while she was in post. The second worker was not offered any training in community conferencing. For a range of reasons, he increasingly worked on his own.

The worker who set up the scheme developed 6 stages for the referrals to pass through. They are:

1.   **A planning meeting** where referring agents and facilitators scope potential for the conference. This involves identifying appropriate agencies and/or participants, setting targets and developing monitoring systems
2.   **Preparation of parties** which involves:
    I. Allocation of facilitators and tasks,
    II. Risk assessment, contact, and visits and assessment of appropriate parties and agencies

3.   Preparation for the conference which involves sharing of information, allocation of conference tasks, booking the venue and resources and briefing referring agents
4.   Conference which involves problem solving dialogue, option appraisal, the formulation of an action plan and agreement of time scales
5.   Debrief meeting – this stage involves writing up a detailed action plan, appraising participants and referring agents
6.   Monitor and review outcomes which involves following up contacts, doing a satisfaction survey and a final conference report before closing a case.

Stages 1-3 were considered important for a range of reasons including:
- To ensure that participants knew exactly what conferencing involved and understood the groundrules
- For facilitators to ensure that potential participants were open to the type of methods used and that they felt it was safe to use with participants
- As a mechanism for facilitators to prepare for the conference
- People who had not been involved in stages 1-3 were not invited to the conference

This preparation meant that by the time people came to the conference the work was already underway. At the end of the conference, participants signed the agreement they had come to.

The second co-ordinator, encouraged by the steering group, who wanted to see 'results' for the project and measured this in the number of conferences held, focused much more on the conference itself.

While the first coordinator was in post (22 months) 25 referrals were received, 2 conferences were held and 12 volunteer facilitators were recruited. Examination of referrals (see p11) indicates however that the number of conferences is a limited indicator of the outcomes of cases and the work of the project.

In the 6 months the second co-ordinator was in post, 2 referrals were received, 3 conferences were held and volunteers were not recruited because of uncertainties about the future of the project and volunteer activity decreased considerably.

Discussions showed divided opinion amongst participants about the approaches of the two co-ordinators. The first co-ordinator's approach was more popular amongst volunteers and local residents. There was strong feeling amongst interviewed volunteers that it was the whole process that was effective and that they had been trained to facilitate parties in communities to find their own solution whereas the second coordinator was working as an arbitrator and in a more directive way. Local residents thought that the first coordinator had a higher profile in the area.

In contrast , some stakeholders were impressed by the number of conferences held while the second co-ordinator was in post and questioned the need for the process work.

Documentary and case study information suggests **there was a high level of satisfaction by participants with the conferences organised using both approaches but by focussing on conferences this might neglect what was achieved in cases that did not go to conference and other aspects of the maintenance and development of the project.** It should also be recognized that the methods used in restorative justice are labour intensive and time consuming (Home Office, undated) in other words, whatever way it is done it is not a quick fix.

Two types of conferencing evolved in the life of the project. For a continuation project, the managing agency and funders will need to agree what type of conferencing should be developed; a process orientated approach of facilitation or a more rapid process which focuses more heavily on the formal conference itself.

Referrals and their outcomes

Referral rates

There were 27 referrals to the project.

Six month block of time	No. of referrals
May-Oct 2002	11
Nov. 2002-April 2003	5
May – Oct 2003	10
Nov 2003 – April 2004	1

Table 1: No of referrals to the project by time period

There has been a disappointing lack of referrals in the most recent 6 month period. The new co-ordinator came into post at the beginning of this period and the manager of the project left during this period. The co-ordinator has been isolated and the uncertainty about whether the project was to be continued may have contributed to this low level of referrals. However table 1 may show similar seasonal variations across all years.

Referrals came from the following sources:

Source of referral	No
New Deal for Communities	7
Victim Support	4
Other voluntary organisations	4
East Manchester Neighbourhood Nuisance Team	2
Scanning, analysis, response and assessment group (SARA)	4
Wardens	2
Residents	2
Openshaw Planning Group	2

Table 2: No. of referrals by source:

The majority of referrals came from organisations represented on the steering group but not necessarily through people on the steering group. Community Conferencing referrals also came through SARA meetings, which were attended by the coordinators. 5 referrals were received from people or organisations that had no direct connection to the project. This suggests that regular contact with other organisations is important to maintain the profile of the organisation.

Outcomes of referrals

Analysis of the reasons for cases being closed indicates that in some situations a lot could be achieved without necessarily going to a case conference:

Reason for closure	Number of cases
Resident reassured situation being addressed by agencies after facilitator involvement	1

Initial assessment visits (IAV's) led to resolution	3
Resolution of problem after initial assessment visits (may not be related to IAVs)	1
Not suitable and referred to another agency	3
Case conference held	5
Led to change in action by agency to prevent situation re-occurring although unresolved between parties	1
All parties did not agree to go to conference	2
Not suitable	3
Unable to proceed as complainant only named party	1
Situation resolved or progressed independently of project involvement	2
Petered out	3
Case closed as a result of risk assessment re-safety issues	1

Table 3: Reasons for case closure

Some participants felt that the community conferencing project provided a way forward where there was insufficient evidence for law enforcement. Whether or not an issue went to conference, if initial assessment visits were done, parties had the opportunity to be listened to and to explore their options. Often this would be the first time when they would feel:

'someone official had shown concern or interest.'

In some situations this can be enough (see first row, in Table 3). There was also the advantage for New Deal for Communities and other agencies, of increased information about a situation.

In 9 cases, fear was recorded as a reason for lack of progress of the case, delays in progress or reasons for people not wanting to attend a conference. While facilitators tried to reassure people, fears of being targeted are strong and in one case (see last row, Table 3) the project itself withdrew because of concerns about safety. While community conferencing has a role in increasing trust and reducing fear in the area, the ability of people to get involved will depend on levels of fear in the areas prior to embarking on a case. This is being addressed by a range of projects in the area eg wardens, and there was clear evidence of joint working with these projects to try and improve levels of safety and reduce fear (see also p17).

The 1999 residents' survey and crime statistics survey showed that crime, community safety and anti-social behaviour were considered the main priorities. Since this time **"significant activity has been put in place to address the problems and there have been many successes and a large reduction in recorded crime figures. Residents' perceptions have changed for the better – fear of crime is reducing, people feel the area is improving and the police have significantly improved their service to the area, however crime remains top of the list of issues of concern" (Beacons for a Brighter Future website, http://www.beaconsndc.com/)**

The case notes indicated that in 13 of the cases, facilitator involvement contributed to some kind of resolution of the issue and in 3, a conference was unnecessary, as initial discussions with parties would enable them to independently resolve the situation without needing to go to conference. Since the aim of community conferencing is to facilitate people to resolve their own problems, clearly these cases should be considered as successfully resolved as if a conference had taken place (see for further information about recording case outcomes). As conferencing is mediation, it can be argued that without a formal conference, the process is similar to other mediation services. It might be useful to consider whether other agencies in the area work on similar cases as those taken up by community conferencing and in a future project to find out if there were any differences in the longer term outcomes of cases that were resolved before or after a formal conference had taken place.

A disadvantage of preparatory work is that it delays bringing people together. Some participants felt this disadvantage outweighs the benefits and this is raised by other studies (Home Office, undated). For example, the case notes of disputes involving young people illustrate that the particular young people involved in disputes can change rapidly. A problem may continue but with different young people involved eg one group of young people may agree not to meet in a particular place, but once they vacate it another group may meet there. For this reason, some participants have suggested that the value of the conferences is that it provides a forum for different generations to discuss things and the opportunity to this 3-4 times a year would be useful as the young people are constantly changing.

While the idea of conferencing is to get the 'victims' and 'perpetrators' together it was interesting that in the 5 conferences held, this did not seem essential to the resolution of the issues. Not all parties attended with conferences set up by both coordinators. One conference involved parents and professionals only and at a second, no young people or parents attended. In the latter case, the outcomes were positive, one month later (see case study 2 below for a detailed example). A key person in the organisation of one conference was a parent of a young person whose behaviour was causing problems and in one case a key resident had experienced problems within her family and hoped by contributing to her community she could prevent others from going through the same experience. Examination of the cases illustrated examples of both a high and low levels of participation, ownership and taking responsibility for problem solving by residents of all ages.

Conclusions and Recommendations – referrals and conferences

The unique feature of the conference was the provision of a forum for inter-generational dialogue and the use of problem solving methods.

Conferencing can work even if not all parties are present.

16

In one third of cases fear delayed or prevented progress of a case. The process of going through conferences can also reduce fear.

Indicators should be developed in order to consider how fear acts as a barrier to community conferencing and how community conferences can break down fear.

In order to encourage participation, one area for further research might be to find out what motivates residents of all ages who do take a high level of responsibility in community conferencing.

Volunteer Facilitators

A high level of community participation to promote local ownership and local support of the community conference project has been advised (Liddle, 2002). One way suggested of doing this is training volunteers to be facilitators. Facilitation can include both the role of meeting people prior to the conference to talk through the issues with them (initial assessment visits) and involvement in planning, running the conferences and debriefing afterwards.

12 Volunteers were recruited to the project between April 2002 and September 2003. Half the volunteers recruited came from the area and half from outside. Several of the volunteers were not active or active for a short period only.

Four volunteers attended a five day residential training course run by Thames Valley Police along with the initial co-ordinator in April 2004. Three of the volunteers stayed with the project for the initial 18 months and became the *'mainstay of the volunteers'*.

These volunteers were all already very active working in the local community, so came with a lot of local knowledge and contacts but were already very busy people. Facilitators recruited after April 2002 were offered a 4 day in house course but because of poor attendance only half the course was held. An ongoing difficulty of the project was to encourage volunteers to come to meetings and training, both of which were central to the initial methods used and maintenance of practice standards (Thames Valley Police, 1999).

Working in pairs, facilitators did initial assessment visits. They visited people identified to invite to community conferences. In the absence of formal training, less experienced facilitators were paired with more experienced so that knowledge and skills could be disseminated. There was recognition that this needed to be backed up with theoretical training and training on personal safety. Over the last few months of the project, initial assessment visits were replaced by contact by letter because of concerns about personal safety (see and the time consuming nature of the visits. Due to uncertainties about the future of the project, volunteer recruitment stopped in the autumn of 2003.

With the discontinuation of initial assessment visits, in the final months of the project, volunteers were only invited to co-facilitate the actual conferences. 3 volunteers participated in the audit of whom only one wanted to be a volunteer and participated in the way conferences were then being run. The other two felt the changes that had taken place had changed the nature of conferences from what they had been trained to do. They would however be prepared to be volunteers if the facilitators role reverts to the way they had been trained. They felt it had become an advisory role and that of an arbitrator whereas they felt the purpose of conferencing was to bring people face to face in an environment where they could sort things out for themselves with the support of facilitation.

Interviewed volunteers felt that community conferencing was worthwhile and that it should be continued but those who had been trained felt strongly that it should only be continued if it was community conferencing as they had learnt

to do it. They were disappointed to see that the capacity, which had been built in the project and through training them, was as they saw it 'being wasted.'

A Home Office report suggests that facilitation of conferences requires more skillful mediation than one-to-one encounters and there is a debate about who might be the most appropriate person to take on this role (Marshall, 1999). It suggests that that the background of restorative justice facilitators is not important but stresses they should be trained and not have other responsibilities within the criminal justice system.

In Thames Valley trained police officers routinely use restorative justice techniques in issuing cautions successfully (Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2002); this is in a one to one situation where the perpetrator has acknowledged guilt and is not a similar situation to community conferencing. A participant in this audit stressed the importance of community conferencing being independent of policing while having strong working relationships, because facilitators must be seen to be impartial. The option suggested by one interviewee of the police running community conferences in East Manchester would not be recommended as a way forward although their involvement is crucial. However the Home Office report (Marshall, 1999) does recommend secondments from other criminal justice agencies which could be considered in the future along with secondments from other interested agencies.

There was a general feeling from volunteers and other stakeholders that people working on community conferencing should be trained. Should the project be taken forward by a co-ordinator, with or without volunteers, hourly paid facilitators or trained facilitators from other agencies. It is important that training offered is appropriate, attractive and accessible to all facilitators. Audit participants made the following suggestions, which should be explored;

- accrediting training – options include as NVQ's or with Mediation UK
- The community conferencing project at Heywood would be open to exploring shared arrangements for training. They have so far run three training programmes and do one every time they have 4-5 new volunteers alongside an equal number of experienced volunteers who act as mentors

It was anticipated at the beginning of the project that after 2.5 years community conferencing would be able to function with volunteers without a paid co-ordinator. Despite problems, especially with recruitment and training of volunteers, there was a period in the latter half of 2003 when it was shown that with good support from the coordinator, volunteers could facilitate initial assessment visits and community conferences with a co-ordinator working in a support capacity.

Options for the future

Participants in the audit identified five options for facilitation in a continuation project:
1. To continue to have volunteers as facilitators

2. To have paid facilitators on an hourly rate
3. For staff to be trained from other organisations to facilitate conferences.
4. For staff to be seconded from other organisations to facilitate conferences.
5. For the co-coordinator to do all the facilitation

The options assume that the project is attracting 1-2 referrals a month as it was in its most active stage and that facilitators are doing both initial assessment visits and facilitating conferences. All the options would require training, ongoing support and co-ordination by a project co-ordinator.

Option 1: To continue to have volunteers as facilitators
What it might look like: The ideal would be 18 volunteers, 6 probably aged 45+, available during the day, 6 available in the evenings, 6 aged 18-24. The age-range would enable facilitators to reflect age groups involved in cases, where a dispute involves older and younger residents. Preferably recruited from East Manchester but not necessarily to work in the area where they live. They should be contracted to work as often as they would like to eg 1 or 2 cases per month. They would do initial assessment visits and facilitate conferences.

Advantages of this model ; if local people can be recruited, a high level of local involvement can be maintained in the delivery of the project. Also potentially builds social capital and employability of people in the area. Might be cheaper if effectiveness can be ensured.

Disadvantages : Is it possible to recruit sufficient volunteers from the local area who have sufficient interest and time to devote to the project?
May slow down the process, as relies on goodwill of volunteers and working around their time constraints.

Option 2 : To have paid facilitators on an hourly rate
What it might look like: Propose to have 6 in all, 2 from each of the groups identified in Option 1

Advantages of this model ; Can contract people to undertake training, attend meetings and facilitate – should speed up the process meeting peoples need for a rapid response without losing out on the development work of the initial assessments.
If local people are recruited, this can maintain some breadth of local involvement and provide paid work for local people and opportunity to develop social capital. It should be easier to manage than volunteers or secondments and therefore may be more cost effective
Disadvantages : It may be more costly, but this needs to be measured against potential efficiency

Option 3: For staff to be trained from other organisations to facilitate conferences.

What might it look like? Staff be offered training in return for a minimum number of hours to work as conference facilitators

Advantages of this model : Builds social capital and involvement of local agencies. Might be cheaper if effectiveness can be ensured.

Disadvantages : Agencies would have to be carefully selected to ensure impartiality was not compromised. Ensuring those trained had time available to do conferencing activities as necessary within other workload commitments may be difficult to arrange. This may reduce involvement of local facilitators.

Option 4: For staff to be seconded from other organisations to facilitate conferences.

What might it look like? Staff seconded to the project for a certain number of hours each week to be trained and work as facilitators

Advantages of this model : Builds social capital and involvement of local agencies. Might be more effective than Option 3

Disadvantages : Agencies would have to be carefully selected to ensure impartiality was not compromised. This may reduce the involvement of local facilitators.

Option 5: For the co-coordinator to do all the facilitation

What it would look like: Self explanatory

Advantages of this model ; Reduce number of people who need to be trained, reduce time that needs to be spent on co-ordination of volunteers or staff aspects of the work

Disadvantages To be manageable may demand abandonment of initial assessment visits. Loss or reduction of local involvement, isolation of the worker, lack of sharing of knowledge and skills in terms of capacity building for the community. High dependency on one person. Safety issues of one person going out on their own and lack of preparation for conferences.

Recommendations – volunteer facilitators

- <mark>Facilitators are involved in all stages of the initial assessment ????? facilitating conference</mark>
- Facilitators should be impartial
- While the project should have strong relationships with organisations involved in the criminal justice system; facilitators should not have other responsibilities within the criminal justice system. This also has implications for mainstreaming. While criminal justice agencies can be partners; they should not be lead funding agencies.
- All facilitators should be trained and receive ongoing support and supervision
- Training should be accredited. Options include through NVQ's or Mediation UK.
- The potential for running shared training with the Heywood scheme should be explored
- Costings should be sought for the options presented above. These should take into account as far as possible:
  - ➢ funding implications including training, expenses, wages
  - ➢ estimates of co-ordinator time involved of each option
  - ➢ estimates of potential efficiency of each option in processing cases
- A decision on which option should be made on the basis of consideration of these 3 factors and monitoring systems should be set up which improve information on these factors (see also p27).

Personal safety issues

Facilitators working in pairs undertook initial assessment visits. After two incidents where people undertaking visits felt intimidated or unsafe, the co-ordinator circulated a survey to volunteers and others who did initial assessment visits about personal safety. This took place in December 2003. 5 replies were received.

3 people reported having an experience where they did not feel safe and two of these felt reluctant to continue such visits. One volunteer who had worked in the locality and been trained in safety issues and who also knew the area and local people well, was confident both about feeling safe and knowing what to do if she did not.

Some initial work has been done to review and develop the safety policy. The wardens have indicated they are keen to support facilitators to increase levels of safety including loan of a radio when facilitators are doing visits.

Relationships with other agencies

The project earned a lot of interest and support from other agencies, which was reflected in referrals, attendance at conferences and co-operation in other aspects of the work. While other agencies offer one to one mediation no other agency offered conferencing. Some people requested training, (which was held for wardens) and one option, which could be explored for the future is training, offered to other agencies in the techniques used. Towards the end of the project external agency links decreased, indicating a need to be pro-active in engaging with other agencies.

Diversity and inclusion

There was no evidence that access issues (eg childcare, transport) or involving disabled, black, lesbian and gay people and others who may be excluded had been addressed.

One conference involved a lot of single mothers, few of which were able to attend. Transport is likely to be an important issue influencing access for evening meetings in low income areas with high levels of fear. And issues of racism and homophobia are likely to be accentuated where there are strong notions of who is an insider or an outsider in an area, a recurrent issue in the case notes. The office was not accessible to people with mobility impairments.

The project was based in the East Manchester offices, which were not in the New Deal For Communities area, which may have made them less accessible to people in the area.

Management, support and strategic development

The City of Manchester Victim Support manager managed the co-ordinator. This was a vacant post in the last few months of the Community Conferencing project, which increased the isolation of the coordinator.

The project had a steering group whose role was to assist and advise in the development and implementation of the project. The steering group had up to 15 members who included local residents, members of local voluntary and statutory organisations especially those with a brief around crime and disorder. Various members of the steering group reported on behalf of the Steering Group to East Manchester Crime Task Group, Beacons Partnership Board and Victim Support.

The meeting attracted an average of 4-6 people with most members participating at different times, but people from Victim Support and the NDC being the most regular participants. The agenda included a project update and discussions focussed on referrals, both increasing the numbers and details of existing referrals, improving the profile of the project, and volunteers. Steering group members were supportive and offered advice but tended to focus on operational concerns rather than strategic ones. For example, steering group minutes do not suggest the steering group gave much consideration to what should happen when funding finished for the project.

Attendance at steering group meetings decreased in the latter quarter of 2003 and meetings were discontinued.

The steering group played an important role in the development of the project, promoting inter-agency links and maintaining both the profile of the project and referral rates.

Community Conferencing Case studies

The audit included in depth consideration of two case conferences, which are described below. The first case study was observed and both were followed up. They are not typical examples but are included to illustrate how conferences can work.

Conference Case Study 1

Background to the case

Residents perspective: Some residents have had cars and property damaged and are unhappy about 2 places where youth congregate. This had had a major impact on their lives, one elderly couple no longer have a car another suffered loss of self esteem. They found young people intimidating.

Young people's perspective: There was not enough for them to do in the area, the nearest youth club was not on their patch. They want floodlights so that they can play football in the park at night, a Youth Centre just for them on their patch and somewhere to ride motorbikes. They feel they get blamed for things other youth do.

There were strengths of the situation, which included:

- A local resident worked energetically with the young people and provided a link between young people and professionals
- Young people have been responsive to things that are arranged for them eg they attended meetings, supported a car washing day to raise money for trips and also to develop more positive relations in the community

There were also weaknesses including that the community were about to lose their community centre.

The process leading to the conference involved the following:

1. After New Deal for Communities suggested community conferencing involvement, a meeting took place between the Community Conferencing coordinator, the voluntary youth worker and young people about community conferencing.

2. 6 weeks later it was formally taken on as a referral. An initial meeting was held between a local policeman, the voluntary youth worker and community conferencing coordinator and it was agreed to proceed to a conference.

3. A contact list of 52 residents identified by the policeman was sent to the project co-ordinator to be invited to the conference. The worker decided not to have initial assessment visits, because of concerns about safety and time but to inform people by letter instead.

A conference date was agreed and letters sent out to residents, parents of young people and service providers, which invited them to attend the conference. The letters referred to anti-social behaviour in the area and explained the aims of the conference. Residents were invited to submit written information if they could not come. Parents were advised that the conference may help young people who are behaving in anti-social ways to change.

The conference

The conference was attended by 35 people; 12 service providers, 7 residents including 1 parent, 16 young people and written submissions were received from 3 residents. The project coordinator chaired the conference and a volunteer undertook a support role. It was 3 hours long.

Resolution

A 13 point action plan was developed which participants were asked to contract to actions with a show of hands. The plan included:

- Different workers agreed to follow up discussions about improving facilities in the park for young people and in the meantime look into possibility of floodlighting for football.
- Residents agree to try and identify alternative accommodation to the Community Centre
- young people agreed not to congregate in the 'hotspots', or do criminal damage
- everyone agreed to try and be more friendly to each other

Feedback from participants

23 people involved in the conference gave feedback to this audit through 2 focus groups (with 11 young people and four residents) and telephone interviews (with facilitators, residents and workers in the area) within 3 weeks of the conference being held. Two months after the conference was held, 5 people gave further feedback. Apart from one person, who was very unhappy about the conference, there was a high level of satisfaction with the conference and its outcomes.
The following issues emerged:

- The young people said they had gone because they had been told that they might get improved facilities in the park if they attended.
- That the conference provided a valuable forum for different generations to discuss issues of concern which did not happen elsewhere
- The majority felt positive overall about the process and outcome of the conference. Positive comments were made about attendance, communication and methods used. In relation to attendance one person said:

> *'Key people were all there, young people were showing their support and vice versa.'*

- The opportunity for communication was the most valued quality of the conference. Comments included appreciating:

  - Interaction – *'That people sat there that long and agreed'*
  - Opportunity for the Council to get message across less officially
  - Good to hear what young people have to say
  - Input from range of agencies
  - Key points were all made

- Young people's comments suggested that empathy had been enhanced, for example:

  'We found out what residents want from young people and what young people want from residents.'

  'It was good to hear about the experience of the elderly couple. I felt sorry for them especially given the life they had been through.'

  Young people thought people had been generous to young people; older people need facilities as well.

- The person, who was not happy with the conference felt the resident's problems, had not been addressed. In contrast, she felt that the young people had an audience and the conference had not achieved what is needed. Observation of the process indicated that the young people did get more attention that the "victims" and residents whose role became to offer support to the young people if they would get involved in more constructive activities. This is not an uncommon situation in conferences as reported by Marshall (1999) who argues that other researchers have shown there is a difficulty of maintaining the focus on the "victim" when most of the participants were there because of their relationship to, and interest in, the "offender".
Another participant felt that the approach to young people was patronising and did not encourage them to contribute. He thought that the balance of people attending was problematic with a large number of unvocal young people and few older residents. Older residents were disappointed that more parents did not attend but the young people did not want their parents there.

A number of suggestions were also made by conference participants about how to improve conferences, which included:

- ideas to make it less formal, use more participatory and empathy promoting methods and reduce the length
- concern about how realistic agreements were and arrangements for follow up
- the need for more pre-conference work and forums for young people
- the need to encourage more parents to get involved
- language needs to be more even handed, not just criminal damage, anti-social behaviour but recognising that young people can be accused wrongfully too. Comments like:

'never going to beat the police, will antagonise. They impress each other by committing crime'

Indicators for success

During interviews and focus groups, participants identified successful outcomes of the conference itself. These included, the way everyone's opinion was valued, no-one was victimised and the peaceful atmosphere. They were also asked to identify how they would measure success in the weeks and months ahead. They identified the following criteria that would indicate that the conference had been successful in the longer term.

- **Getting to know each other -** Improve trust; reduce suspicion. Start treating each other like equals. Breaking down barriers and creating dialogue between sufferers; perpetrators

- **Young people listened to**

- **Agencies do what they say they will do** For the young people the crucial issue is to get the floodlights in the park

- **Young people satisfied with what is possible**

- **Young people keep away from the hotspots**

- **Positive feedback from workers, residents and young people Reduction in calls to police and criminal damage.**

Within 3 weeks of the conference some positive and negative situations were reported. A resident who visited the park said that four young people were in the play area with their heads down.

> ' It felt a bit friendlier – able to joke, tension was broke. I spoke to them and felt less wary. Knew each other (not by name but as a result of the conference) It has broken the ice both ways'

However one resident felt less positive when a flower area was dug up.

A professional felt that it had:

> 'Developed our agency link at street level'

Initially it was reported that young people were keeping away from the hotspots

5 participants were followed up 8 weeks later. They all reported that things were 'quiet'. A resident who had experienced problems prior to the conference said, the effect of the conference had been:
> 'Marvellous, it's quiet. It made a big impact on the youth around.'

There appeared to be some confusion about progress on the lights in the park. One person reported that it was going ahead while another said that young people were organising a petition to present to the Chief Executive of New Deal for Communities, as there was still opposition in the area. This indicates there is room for better communication between people and agencies in the area.

10 weeks after the conference, it was confirmed that funding had been identified to enhance facilities for young people in the park and that young people were to be invited to a meeting to discuss draft plans and sign the formal application for funding, to give them ownership.

The local policeman reported that he thought that the young people were hanging about less and there had been a reduction in public order incidents. He had figures for reports of criminal damage for an area which included the patch which the conference covered but was not exclusive to the patch. He estimated that there were usually 20 -25 cases reported per month. This had dropped to 10 the month before and after the conference but increased to 25 the following month. The increase could have been related to better weather, school holidays and/or be exceptional and longer term follow up would be necessary to draw any conclusions from public order incident figures.

Illustrations from this case
The case illustrated the following issues:
- The involvement of young people in this conference is probably associated with the work of the voluntary youth worker
- The uniqueness of the conference forum for inter generational discussion was highly valued by local residents
- There was a lot of empathy on both sides and this is something that can be built on
- The conference helped to build trust
- The involvement of local agencies was highly valued by local residents

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Recommendations from Case Study 1

Care should be taken to ensure equal focus on all parties and not focus more attention on the perpetrators than the victims.

Participants made a range of suggestions about how the conference could be improved e.g. participatory methods, length, realistic agreements.

The method used to identify what people would see as success worked well and should be incorporated into the follow up survey done immediately after the conference (see monitoring below). These indicators of success would then be used for further follow up.

The Community Conference Coordinator could promote better communication, where follow up shows that there may be ongoing problems e.g. about meeting agreements made.

Negotiations should take place with the police to identify more specifically what figures should be recorded, for a period before a case, during and afterwards, in order to be able to measure impact of police activity more effectively (See also pps 27-9).

Case study 2

Background to the case

This referral was concerned with boys and teenagers congregating near a housing unit for a particular client group. They were intimidating staff and residents there had been car theft, burglary, sexual harassment and young people congregating in local empty houses where they would drink alcohol.

It took 13 months from referral to case conference and reasons for this included:
- The problem kept coming and going
- fear of a complainant being too obvious and this might make the situation worse for this person

During this time different young people were alleged to be causing the problems.

Volunteers did initial assessment visits to young people's homes with a local warden, 8 months after the initial referral and 5 months before the conference.

The conference

The case conference attracted 12-14 people. There were no young people there except during the final half hour when some teenage women attended who were not directly involved with the problem. 6 local residents attended (including one from the housing unit). Four residents submitted written evidence (including 2 from the housing unit). 6 professionals attended from 5 agencies. No volunteers were involved.

Resolution

A number of issues were identified that needed to be addressed. Throughout the case there had been knowledge that the young people had a strong sense of who belonged in the area. They did not act in anti-social ways with people who they thought 'belonged.' This could be anyone from outside the area or that the residents of the unit were seen by the young people as "outsiders". The Residents Association offered to organise a coffee evening in the housing unit as a way of getting to know and supporting the residents. The Association were keen to show they welcomed the unit as part of the community because they believed if they did this the young people would stop targeting people from the housing unit. Both the Residents Association and the Warden service offered to visit people who were worried.

Feedback from participants

In the week immediately after the conference, 5 telephone interviews were conducted. They were with the facilitator and 4 people who attended. They were generally positive about the conference and found it:
> '*relaxed, informative, not heavy, delivered well*'
> '*the conference helped to focus people on solutions.*'

They were pleased with the solution. Participants were disappointed with the attendance especially the lack of young people and parents. One person said they had really wanted to tell young people how the intimidation and harassment experience had felt. One resident who does not usually go to residents meeting said it had encouraged her to want to go to other meetings.

I month later, the manager of the housing unit said that there had been a few minor incidents but they had got through the Easter holiday without major problems. They were now confidant that they were going to keep on top of problem. They were feeling isolated but were now getting much more support from professionals. The community conference had helped them make links with residents and get their ideas and support. No coffee evenings been held so far but they were hoping to start holding them fortnightly.

Illustrations from this case

The case illustrated the following issues:
- Fear – how fear can inhibit conferences and how a conference can reduce fear
- The youths who are causing problems can change over relatively short periods
- That people visited are not necessarily those who attend a conference.
- If young peoples do not attend a conference, there may be other people in the community who have an understanding of why people might be targeted and strategies that may be able to address this.

Participants in both case studies were concerned about lack of parental involvement and this has been raised by other studies as an issue. In some conferences in East Manchester parents took an active role.

Recommendations from Case Study 2
Advocate contact on behalf of parties who cannot attend the conference
Proactive work with parents can beneficial – particularly where specific young people involvement occurs

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Brief comparison with Heywood scheme

One of the other 5 pilot community conferencing projects is based in Heywood, Greater Manchester. When visited, it had been running for 14 months, with a full-time co-ordinator. Like the East Manchester project, it is managed by Victim Support and funded by New Deal for Communities. It has greater independence from Victim Support, with its own shop front offices in the centre of Heywood, offering a drop-in service and its own policies and procedures. The project has received 70 referrals, has built up strong inter-agency relationships and has 21 volunteers. The budget is £135,000 for 2 ¼ years.

So far 2 conferences have been held and 3 more are planned. As in East Manchester, the scheme has had to consider the role of formal conferencing in their work. They have developed systems to record different outcomes of cases (see monitoring below) but as they are currently updating their information systems, numerical data was not available.

The Heywood project is keen to develop working relationships with a continuation project in East Manchester, eg see facilitators p14. They have addressed a range of issue that have been identified in this audit that would need addressing in a continuation project. For example:

- Re-establishment and development of inter-agency relationships, in particular very close links with the local enforcement team and offering early intervention in disputes to a range of agencies
- Monitoring systems (see below)

Recommendation concerning collaboration with the Heywood project

That opportunities for collaboration between the two projects be developed further e.g. co-training, sharing good practice (e.g. monitoring systems)

Record keeping and monitoring

The case notes kept were excellent and could clearly be used well by a team of facilitators. If the project is continued, it may be helpful for the co-ordinator when taking on a case to complete a referral form in order to get more systematic information. For example, a breakdown of the types of cases, Heywood has identified 10 categories.

Thought should be given to how case closure is reported. Heywood uses 3 categories that may be of use:

- resolved by case conferencing
- unresolved by case conferencing and referred and
- resolved by another agency.

Follow up after a case is closed, also needs to be developed, if there has been resolution, whether or not a conference has been held. The use of a mailed out satisfaction survey has not been successful and there has been no attempt to collect long term outcome information. Telephone feedback was a successful way of obtaining information for the audit and is done successfully in Heywood 3 and 6 months after a case is closed. The method of enabling participants to identify their own criteria for success of a conference used in this audit should be developed for routine follow up (see <mark>23 above</mark>).

The Cost Effectiveness

The first question people often ask evaluators are about the cost effectiveness the project. While it is easy to say what a project cost. Specific data needs to be available to assess effectiveness. The Heywood project may be more cost effective than East Manchester. The cost is approximately double that of East Manchester and the outputs are clearly more than double those in East Manchester. However outcome information is not available and there may be a range of differences in the areas, which makes direct comparison of the projects inappropriate.

Impact on police activity was identified as an outcome in the proposal. This is not routinely collected, a mechanism needs to be identified to address this. Heywood collect data before and after project involvement for the police, housing and environmental health.

Consideration of action plans illustrated that while some action plans were relatively short and involved activities that should be realistic, others were long and included actions that required a lot of development work without consideration of how this could be realised.

If the project is to be mainstreamed, monitoring should also recognise that inter-agency partnerships and community participation require resources. The ongoing success of the project will depend on avoidance of the

> 'burden of expectation and involvement of local people and groups to a level they cannot sustain' . (Marshall, 1999 p28).

 The project will need to develop alongside other community programmes. (Home Office, undated)

The aims of conferencing should also be more specifically addressed in the monitoring systems, for example:

- Reducing fear in the neighbourhood
- Increasing confidence that crime and disorder is being effectively addressed
- Intergenerational dialogue

- Thus the proposed outputs and monitoring systems of a future project should reflect these things more specifically.

The Heywood project is working on new information systems and liaison with them in updating East Manchester's systems would be useful.

Case notes also indicated an interest by staff in other agencies eg housing, to gain the skills used within the project. Potential for developing this in a continuation project is recommended.

Recommendations - Record keeping and monitoring

1. On the basis of exiting data, it is recommended that a continuation project may be more cost-effective if it is better resourced. It should include a full-time worker with administrative support.
2. The following recommendations are made to review systems for collecting information for monitoring;
   a. Use of a referral form administered by the co-ordinator should enable the collection of systematic data.
   b. Develop a wider range of categories to report on case closure
   c. After a case is closed, follow up mechanisms and monitoring need to be developed. A questionnaire, administered over the telephone, at regular intervals is recommended. Use of the method of enabling participants to identify their own criteria for success of a conference used in this audit should be developed for routine follow up
   d. Indicators for monitoring should be developed which can give a clearer indication of cost effectiveness.
   e. Monitoring systems should be developed to more specifically relate to the process, outputs and outcomes of community conferencing and take into account the aims of conferencing and project proposals. A range of issues have been identified through the audit:

   - The number of people who have contact with facilitators to discuss a problem
   - Where residents feel that they had the opportunity to be listened to, consider solutions to a problem
   - Where contact has had an impact on levels of reassurance that a person's concerns are being addressed
   - Number of instances where people wanted no further action because of fear of making things worse
   - Impact on trust in the community
   - Impact on ability to solve the problem
   - Satisfaction with contact with the project and other services
   - Other local people involved and how (eg in influencing the project, as facilitators)

- Activity which might lead to prevention of similar issue re-occurring eg what can go on the open part of a web-site about others

  f. addressing the impact of conferencing on activity of other agencies including the police (see also p25).

3. Information collected suggested conference action plans should be realistic
4. The Heywood project is working on new information systems and liaison with them in updating East Manchester's systems would be useful.
5. Potential for training staff in other agencies in community conferencing methods could be explored in a future project.

Evaluation

It has already been recommended that the next phase of the project should be innovative. A need has also been identified to further develop monitoring methods. An independent evaluator working alongside the project throughout its duration would enable reflective practice and a specialist to firmly embed high standards of monitoring and evaluation in the project. A recommended costing for evaluation is 15% of the total costs of a project.

Recommendations - Evaluation

The evaluator of the continuation project should advise on information needs that will enable a clearer understanding of what the project achieves and its cost effectiveness.

Costings for a future project should cover an independent evaluator working alongside the project throughout its duration.

Recommendation on dissemination of this report

In the interests of maintaining local involvement and ownership of the project, it is recommended that funding be applied for as soon as possible and a meeting be held to discuss the audit's findings. People who participated in this audit and other interested people should be invited. The report would be forwarded to the Neighbourhood Renewal Unit as part of the evaluation of the five pilot schemes.

Conclusions

1.   The project has successfully led to the resolution of a problem in 13 cases involving 204 people including 46 young people. This compares well with the outputs suggested in the proposal of 14 conferences involving 140 people including 60 young people.

2. During the life of the project 2 styles of casework developed, one, which was more process orientated and the second, which focused more specifically on the conferences. Records of the 5 case conferences held indicate that there was a high level of satisfaction from the majority of participants utilizing both styles.

3.The provision of a forum for inter-generational dialogue was the quality that was most valued about community conferencing and should be maintained. No other facilities offering this in the area were identified.

4. Comparison with the Heywood project indicated that the East Manchester project may have been under-resourced.

5.27 referrals were received for the project, of which 1 was received in the final 6 months when contact between the coordinator and other agencies reduced. Regular contact with other agencies is crucial to maintain the profile of the project

6.A conference was not always necessary or appropriate in the resolution of a case and that measurement by number of conferences may neglect consideration of other outputs and factors, which result in maintenance, and development of the project.

7. Conferencing can work even if not all parties are present at the formal conference.

8.At one phase in the project, volunteers were doing most of the facilitation but by the end of the project the number of volunteers and their involvement had decreased to a very low level.

9. It is important that the project works with but is independent of other agencies working in the criminal justice system

10. Initial findings indicate that community conferencing is able to increase trust and reduce isolation but fear and lack of trust prevented progress in one-third of cases.

11. A lot can be learned from the Heywood project and there are opportunities for greater collaboration.

12. There is a need for a continued high level of innovation and evaluation within the project, including development of indicators for monitoring.

13. More attention should be given to ensure that the project is accessible to all eg provision of childcare and transport and access for disabled, black, lesbian and gay people and others who may be excluded.

14. The project has earned widespread respect and interest by key stakeholders for there to be interest for continuation with a view to mainstreaming in the medium term.

Recommendations

The recommendations have been identified under headings throughout the text, and here, to suggest who might take responsibility and at what time.

For immediate implementation

1. A feedback meeting on the audit should be held as soon as possible in order to facilitate ongoing local involvement and ownership in the project. The project coordinator may be able to lead on this.
2. On the basis of exiting data, it is recommended that a continuation project may be more cost-effective if it is better resourced. It should include a full-time worker with administrative support, in a location within the area of the project, costed facilities for better inclusion, accredited training and independent evaluation
3. The managing agency should develop a proposal for a better-resourced project, which includes resources to explore options for mainstreaming in the light of the findings of this audit. A proposal for a continuation project should be based on the findings in this audit report and suggestions from the feedback meeting in 1 above. Officers from New Deal for Communities should be centrally involved in the development of the proposal. A number of recommendations in this proposal should be addressed to write the proposal, for example:
   - size if project, see p27
   - costings of options for facilitators, see p 17
   - diversity and inclusions issues, see p18
   - location see p 18
   - evaluation p30

Prior to recruitment

Victim Support should review arrangements for

- management and support of the coordinator,
- the steering group
- strategic development of the project (see p

For the coordinator, manager and steering group of the continuation project

1. Develop accessible and attractive training to ensure all facilitators are trained. Training should be accredited.
2. Explore options for joint training with Heywood community conferencing project
3. The safety policy for the project should be agreed and implemented and personal safety issues should be included in mandatory training for facilitators
4. Suggestions for developing the range of conference methods should be incorporated into conference practice (p24)

5. Options for mainstreaming community conferencing should be considered. It is important that the project is impartial. It would therefore be inappropriate for a criminal justice agency to be the lead agency, however it could be a partner agency.

For the evaluator in liaison with the coordinator, manager and steering group of the continuation project

Arrangements for monitoring the processes, outputs and outcomes of the project should be developed, ()

Possible practice developments

There was interest in the methods used in conferencing within other agencies, a training role could be explored.

Possible research developments

Examination of the cases illustrated examples of both a high and low levels of participation, ownership and taking responsibility for problem solving by residents of all ages. One area for further research might be to find out what motivates residents of all ages that do take a high level of responsibility in this situation ()

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