

Case Study

Take Part Hertsmere

Introduction

In Borehamwood, Hertsmere, the Take Part project set out to work with anyone who lives in the most deprived ward of Cowley Hill but with a focus, though not exclusively on seven key groups: Older people, BME, people with disabilities, women, children and young people, LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender) and people with mental health issues. Take Part was all about empowering individuals who may currently feel they do not have a voice within the community but want to be heard and want to get involved in local decisions. It also aimed to promote understanding of people from different backgrounds and increase the amount of people who get on better together.

Over 500 participants were recorded on the Take Part Database and have been involved in the Take Part Programme through learning activity.

34% of participants are unemployed (at the time of enrolment) and 9% retired whilst only 10% are in full time employment. A further 19% of participants did not provide their employment status. Another reason that participants are less likely to be employed is that it would be difficult for employed people to attend activity during the day and this can be a barrier to engagement and getting people involved in the local area. This has been another consideration when organising events leading to some being held at weekends and evenings.

Key Achievements

The activities which, took place fell into 5 main categories:

- Outreach Sessions
- Events to Raise Awareness of Services
- Visits to Parliament and council offices
- Skills & Development Training
- Confidence & Community Leadership Courses.

In some cases there was a reluctance to complete enrolment and evaluation forms and in some instances due to learning difficulties or language barriers this has not been possible (although forms were translated into three languages: Polish, Gujarati and Urdu). Therefore it was important that this was overcome through documents being produced in other languages, easy read format and face to face communication. It is also evident that this is a barrier to participation and services which the project was seeking to overcome. Take Part participants have proved to be very resilient and pro-active and there are numerous examples of self-support. For example a young lady from Townsend House Girls Hostel helped a young man from the Multi Purpose Day Care Centre to complete his evaluation form at the close of a local Take Part meeting, also emphasising the community integration resulting from the project.

Working with people with mental health problems and disabilities:

24% of Take Part participants from Cowley Hill declared themselves to have a disability. Engagement with people with mental health problems and disabilities has been

approached in two different ways. The Multi Purpose Day Centre serving people in Cowley Hill was used initially to promote the programme with regular users of the centre. This has proved to be a huge success story with great enthusiasm from the users as can be seen from the photograph below.

An outward bound course was used for a group from the MPDC to build their confidence and self esteem. For many this was a unique experience which helped to spark their interest in the programme and even in shaping what the programme can offer. This approach led to four of the individuals becoming community leaders and taking a very active role in shaping other Take Part activities as well as influencing services.



As Community Leaders, participants agree to act as a link for their peers at the day centre. As such they listen to any concerns or ideas and feed these back through the appropriate service structures for action and then feedback responses to the individuals. A group of Community Leaders from the Multi-Purpose Day Centre are now involved in an 'Easy Read' project working with council officers to produce leaflets and other written material that can be understood by people with learning difficulties.

One Voice GuidePosts project workshops were set up for people with mental health problems. Discussions centred on what mental health means and how it exists today and what changes need to happen to achieve greater understanding, to decrease stigmatisation of participants and to increase community engagement with sufferers. As part of the programme participants gained valuable experience and confidence in public speaking and communication and some of them presented at a Take Part visit to County Hall. Five participants are now Community Leaders and have been trained to provide awareness talks about mental health issues for services like the Police, the Fire Service, Hertsmere Borough Council and voluntary organisations.

Working with Older and Younger people

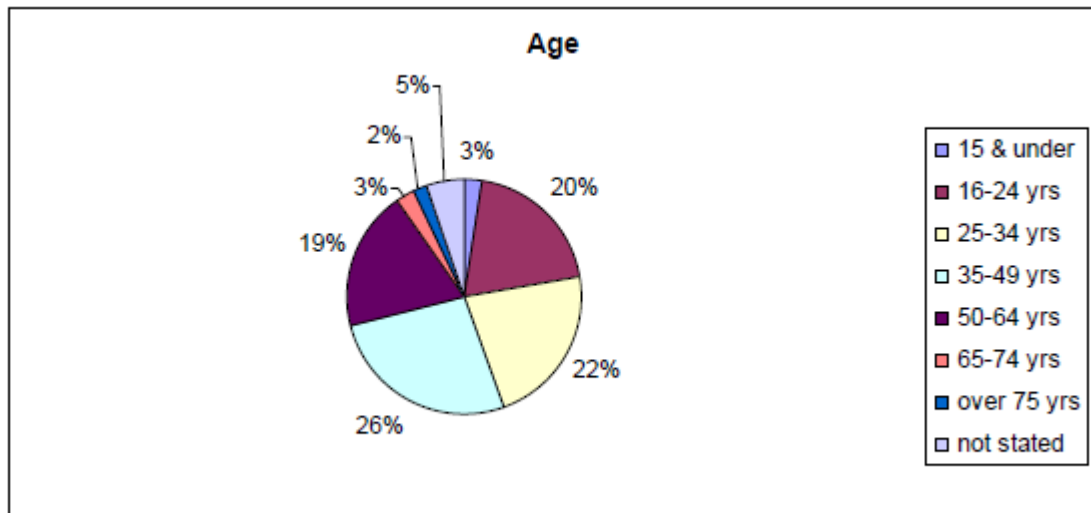
22% participants are over 50. An event to promote the programme was organised for an established group of over 50's linked to St. Theresa's Church. The same event was used to promote and target services and support available to the over 50's in the borough. This included information about the First Contact Scheme and over 50's activity classes delivered by Hertsmere Borough Council. Over 70 people attended these events.

The visits to parliament were particularly popular with this age group. So much so that the '50 plus team' at Hertsmere Borough Council subsequently provided additional trips to parliament for older people living in other areas of Borehamwood. These trips are proving extremely popular with full take up.

23% of participants are under 25. Young People attended the first Hertsmere Borough Council visit and posed questions to the Leader of the Council and Chief Executive about youth facilities in the area and activities for young people. Awareness was raised about youth activities delivered by the Council and partners, which are often not widely known or accessed. An Annual Youth conference organised by the Borough Council incorporated Take Part participants and some older people and discussed youth stereotyping and ways overcoming this.

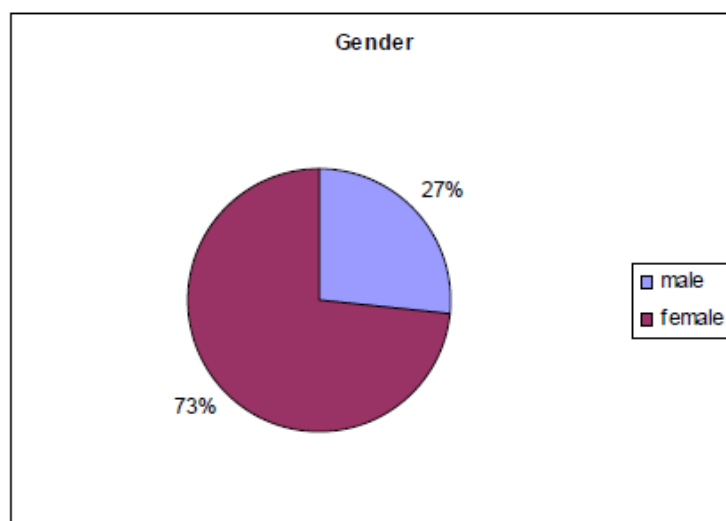
Many young women attended the outward bound courses and community leadership courses to build up their confidence as many have difficult home lives and one young mum said *'I thought because I am a young single mum my views didn't count and I now realise that I can influence things in the area and I am now taking a course at college as well'* (Kelly Fountain, Take Part participant).

A day trip to Parliament for families was organised as a result of Take Part involving younger children who are not directly on the Take Part programme but have benefited from additional activities and additional funding from elsewhere



Working with Women

73% of Take Part participants are female. Significant numbers of young mothers from the local school, Meryfield, have become actively involved in the programme. Childcare issues, timings of events and relevant activities are important considerations for this group. Coffee mornings and 'school gate networking' have been key factors in encouraging them to get involved in activities. Importantly some of them have become Community Leaders and are encouraging and leading their peer groups to get involved in the Parent's Association and become School Governors



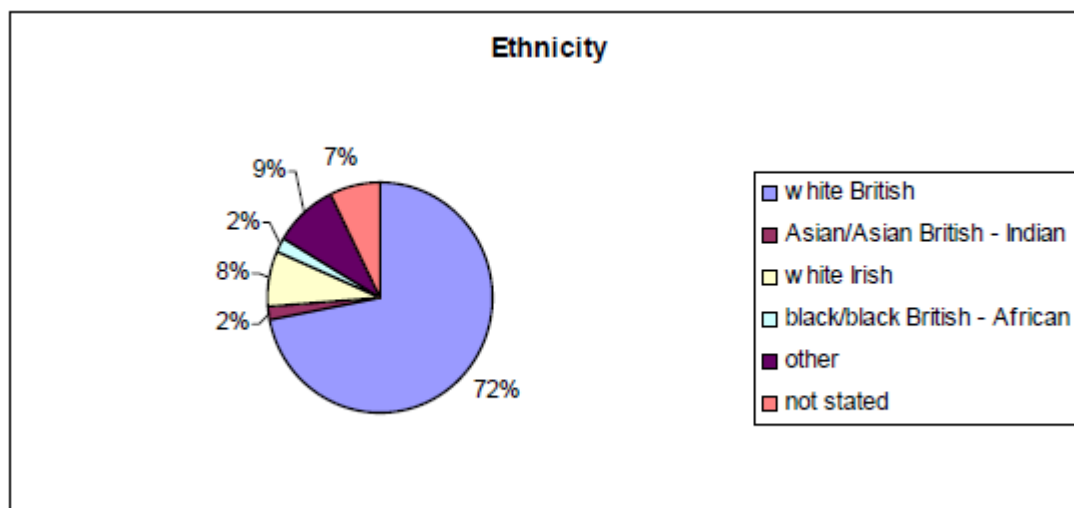
Many of the young female participants in Cowley Hill are mothers, and often single mothers. Childcare has been identified as a real concern for many and the project has

highlighted the need for suitable provision. Where appropriate we made the necessary arrangements for providing childcare at events by reimbursing costs and ensuring the care is provided with a registered childcare professional.

Working with BME communities

As can be seen from the chart below 72% of participants in Cowley Hill are White British. When we take account of people who did not state their ethnicity we find that 21% of participants in Cowley Hill represent BME communities. This figure is a fair representation of the demographics for this area.

An example of engagement with individuals from other backgrounds is through the school networking – both at the ‘school gates’ and at regular coffee mornings. Some of young Eastern European women had perceived language barriers but overcame those barriers and grew in confidence to the extent that they became formed a small project team to organise and managed one of the visits to Hertsmere Borough Council – being responsible for everything from preparing the agenda and welcome packs, to registration of participants and photography at the event. They also now understand more about how the council works and how to access information and services.



Next steps

This project has benefited a number of residents in the community and improved community cohesion. It has also increased the understanding of public and voluntary sector services and subsequently access to services. It has allowed for services to be influenced and redesigned reflecting the needs and aspirations of the community. The project is currently being delivered in Bushey and Potters Bar, to continue to foster good relations in our community.