

Leading Change –Taking Practical Action to challenge inequality

Amina Lone, Women’s Equality Campaigner

Donna Miller, Associate Director, BHA for Equality

Sarah Whitehead, Co-Director, Community Pride

Anne Marie Marshall introduced the session, providing a context for the workshop and explaining that we need to produce 3 actions as a conclusion to our discussions.

Amina Lone – Women’s equality campaigner works at Voluntary Sector North West and is also Co-Director of the Social Action and Research Foundation.

Amina opened up with a question for the audience

“How many of you would attend an event if it was segregated by race?”

Overwhelming response was that this was not acceptable. She then posed the question

“How many of you would attend an event if it was segregated by sex?” before going on to talk about her work campaigning against segregation in Faith based institutions.

Although society in general does not accept sex based segregation when it happens as part a culture it can often go unchallenged.

The campaign has highlighted how this segregation and difference based on sex, begins at a very young age with children aged 4 having to wear the Hijab to attend school.

Amina highlighted the barriers to participation faced in discussions of women’s rights within Faith based institutions, the difficulties of challenging equality issues and how she and others have been accused of being “Islamophobia” in respect of this particular campaign.

She pointed out that if “Radical Change” makes you feel uncomfortable, change is often scary and challenging systems can result in threats against safety as has been seen in online discussions around LGBT rights in schools.

In respect of segregation by sex within faith based institutions, this is an issue for everyone regardless of colour culture or religion. Amina asked us to think about why we tolerate segregation around sex when we would not tolerate the same segregation if it was around race or disability.

She ended her session with a call to action for us all to challenge segregation based on sex and to question why 4 year old girls have to wear the Hijab.

Donna Miller – Associate Director Police and Development, BHA for Equality in Health & Social Care

In her talk Donna informed the group that she would be providing an overview of Equality and what she believes should be happening in relation to equality and highlighted that:

“VCSE sector has a significant role in making change, we can adapt and as we don’t have to deal with the bureaucracy, layers of management and constant restructuring that takes places in the public sector...”

She went on to say how Devolution promised change but in reality there is still positive work to be done to achieve the necessary changes particularly in relation to health.

She provided a great example of how in the 90’s her own organisation BHA for Equality was established as a direct response to the needs of the BME males with HIV who, at that time, were isolated had no support and often died alone. 29 years later this organisation has developed further and becoming a health equality Charity which not only provides a range of services and support to BME communities but also campaigns about these issues to influence policy and practise.

On the one hand we have services such as this which have grown and developed in relation to health inequality, but on the other hand Donna also highlights that:

“Race equality is in regression” and there may be a need for us a sector to look at how we can improve our practise.

Within the Public Sector there are different standards and legislations in place such as NHS Workplace Race Equality Standard, NHS Equality Delivery system requiring the public sector to monitor and ensure compliance with the equality legislation. Donna highlighted the lack of representation of staff and volunteers particularly in VCSE infrastructure and questions what we, as a sector have in place to

“... Review our effectiveness in relation to equality”

Although there have been some great examples of the VCSE sector coming together to consider equality such as the GM Equality Parliament and, 10 years later the proposal of a GM equality body as part of the work of the GM Health and Social Care Partnership. Donna has concerns about the “lack of cohesion” .After 28 years of working at Commission for Racial Equality / Equality & Human Rights Commission, Donna talked of her frustration of hearing the same discussions now as she was involved in 30 years ago.

Donna asked how we, as a sector can deal with this and states that the VCSE could be a powerful force in looking at equality, but in order to do so we need robust systems in place.

There are Equality Impact Assessments – do we use them?

How can we make sure these are carried out effectively?

Sarah Whitehead – Co-Director Community Pride CIC

As an introduction to her talk Sarah posed the following questions:

“Who has the Power to lead change?” “Who in Salford?” before emphasising that we ALL have the power.

It is helping people to recognise that they have power, which is the key.

“Who decides what a community needs? Are local people deciding?”

If not then change WON'T happen.

Highlighting that people who create poverty will never change it. Sarah quoted the American Community activist Audre Lord

“The master’s tools will never dismantle the master house”

This led to a discussion around the fact that those affected by poverty are the ones who will change it.

Sarah used her own experiences of being a Community Activist in the city of Salford to elaborate on this further. She talked about her work with Poverty Truth Commission and Mad Pride as perfect examples of what can be achieved when projects centred on communities begins with conversations instigated by the communities themselves.

The discussion was then opened up to workshop delegates for questions and comments

Nathan Yeowell provided another useful example of community as the starting point. A piece of work by NPC involving those with lived experience of disability and race. He was in agreement with the panel all issues raised

Further discussion highlighted the following useful points and further questions to consider:

- How we engage is essential, it should never be a tick box exercise
- Grassroots projects (e.g. Mad pride) have succeeded despite the “blocks” from commissioners
- Really has been no change in 30 years – this is frustrating
- The cavalry is not coming - we are cavalry
- Help comes from the bottom not from above
- Which organisations are good examples of equality in practise?
- What’s happening in our own organisations and how can we tweak that?
- We need the sector to work together!!
- We have funding for distinct pieces of work for distinct sectors of our communities when actually that work will cut across other areas of community sectors
- Paternalistic attitude leads to a – TO PEOPLE NOT WITH PEOPLE approach. We need a Human Acts approach
- We know a lot about the Top Down approach - do the “bottom” need to do things differently?
- What we do should not be competitive. VCSE sector should be working together.
- We as a sector, and individual organisations with VCSE can be as guilty as anyone – we all need to think how we can best enable communities.

- Why is there no investment in projects that are successful (e.g. Poverty Truth Commission)

Following this lively discussion the workshop concluded with the following

3 Action points:-

- 1. Go to the Community – Ask them what they want**
 - Advocate for people
- 2. Revive our engagement mechanisms**
 - Communities are our assets
 - Importance of using language that people understand
- 3. People need to be at the FRONT and CENTRAL to discussions about them.**

What is Co-production in Salford?

 - Establish REAL co-production for the sector , working with people in effective ways
 - Look to our “Local Success Stories” – e.g. Poverty Truth Commission as examples of good practise.