The Blackburn with Darwen Healthy Living Citizen’s Jury on Alcohol Abuse in Shadsworth, Blackburn

EVALUATION REPORT OCTOBER 2011

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Summary

- The Shadsworth Citizens’ Jury was effective in building local capacity and capability to address issues of alcohol related harm.

- Service providers gained a more grounded understanding of the nature and extent of the social impacts of alcohol abuse.

- Those members of the community who became Jurors became better informed of the various sources of help and guidance on the impacts of alcohol abuse and were better able to access appropriate services and to transfer their knowledge to other residents.

- The Citizen’s Jury generated a high degree of belief in self-help and this led to a decision by the Jurors to continue the work of the Jury beyond its lifespan. The Jury thus led to sustained community intervention and support.

- The provision of mentoring and support to the new organization formed amongst the Jurors to address alcohol abuse at Shadsworth will be crucial to its survival over the first twelve month period.

Introduction

The use of Citizens’ Juries as a means of engaging people in public discourse around social and ethical issues and in the development and growth of their communities has gained a high profile in the last decade (Reeves, 1997; Dunkerley and Glasner, 1998; Kenyon, 2005). Opinion on the efficacy of citizen’s juries remains divided; Aldred (2011) for example, suggests that participatory research in policy-making displays problematic issues such as the imposition of structural problems as misperceptions and unfounded assumptions about social change. Such dysfunctional traits might however be eliminated or minimised through methodological sensitivity in the management of citizens’ juries and become, as expressed by Kashefi and Mort (2004), grounded as a tool for activism. The Citizens’ Jury under review in this evaluation offers a good example of this latter category insofar as it engaged residents of a housing estate in a local issue - alcohol abuse - which affected them directly or indirectly. This Citizens Jury led to the formation of a community action group by the residents who formed it, with the aim of developing a local and sustainable means of tackling, through appropriate agencies, a wide range of alcohol-related social problems.
Methodology

The Citizen’s Jury on Alcohol Abuse was commissioned by Blackburn with Darwen NHS in support of the Public Health National Support Team recommendations to form local plans to pursue alcohol harm reduction. The target completion date was 30th June 2011. The Evaluation Team was not provided by Blackburn with Darwen NHS with either terms of reference or a brief for the evaluation and what follows is essentially a report based on a “common sense” and essentially pragmatic basis which adopted a similar approach to previous evaluations of community interventions undertaken by Blackburn with Darwen Healthy Living.

The evaluation team attended all but one of the Jury Sessions held at Shadsworth. At the first meeting the team met the volunteer jurors to explain the purpose of the evaluation and to emphasise that what was being evaluated was the process of the citizen’s jury and not the performance of the jurors themselves. The evaluation team remained for the duration of each meeting attended to listen to the guest speakers, observe the interrogation of the speakers by the citizen’s jury and to observe the presentation and supervision of the session by Blackburn with Darwen Healthy Living. At the final session the evaluation team was able to conduct a focus group with the citizen’s jury to discuss the extent to which they felt the intervention had been useful and well-managed and to explore their views on how the jury might be developed as a sustainable community project.

Shadsworth

Shadsworth estate is situated on the eastern edge of Blackburn. Built in the immediate post-World War Two era it has experienced significant social and economic disadvantage over the past twenty-five years. It is less culturally diverse than some other proximate neighbourhoods with an approximate 91% of its population being White British. Just over half of the adult population is unemployed (50.1%) and skills levels are relatively low with 20.1% being skilled and 31.3% being semi-skilled or unskilled. 14.5% of the population reported they were not in good health to the 2001 Census compared to a national proportion of 11%.
Recruitment

Potential jurors were recruited by the Healthy Living Team prior to the first meeting. 12 members of the public attended the first meeting; some had been contacted prior to the meeting while others had come either as friends or contacts or had responded to public notification of the Jury.

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<th>Recruitment Schedule</th>
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<td><strong>Action</strong></td>
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Twelve people (9 women, 3 men) volunteered to become Jurors at the first meeting. Attendance fluctuated slightly over the duration of the Jury with a ‘hard core’ being present at all the meetings. Some other people joined after the first week and attended some of the following meetings. The Jurors included members of other community organisations, relatives of alcoholics, parents of teenage children and parents of younger children.
Experience of living with or among people with alcohol abuse tendencies was for several jurors a motivating factor in their participation.

_I have a family and ex-partners who have abused alcohol and had already attended a previous Alcohol Focus Group, so I decided to become a part of this Jury so I could have a voice and hopefully enable change._ [Juror 1]

_I was interested in this group as I know a few people with drink problems and I thought I might get a better understanding. Also, I would like a better place for my children to grow up in._ [Juror 2]

_I joined to see if I could make the area better for my boys._ [Juror 5]

**The programme**

The series of Citizens’ Juries ran on Tuesday evenings from 3rd May 2011 to 14th June 2001. The meetings commenced at 6.30 p.m. and usually finished at approximately 8.30 p.m. All meetings were held at Shadsworth Community Centre which is situated in the middle of Shadsworth Estate and is easily accessible.

Each meeting was co-ordinated and attended by three members of Blackburn with Darwen Healthy Living staff. This enabled up to three break-out groups to run ay any one time.

**The first meeting**

The first session was important to the formation and sustainability of the Jury. The Co- ordinators explained clearly the purpose of the Jury. The Jurors were enabled to establish an agreed set of aims, procedures and a code of conduct through group activities and a plenary session. They thus gained a sense of ownership of the jury and an appreciation of their own agency. In particular the Jury was encouraged to prioritise aspects of alcohol they felt most immediately important at Shadsworth. Initially public health did not have a high profile, with criminality, under-age drinking and family breakdown being cited as important though by the close of the session health, in its wider sense, emerged as a major theme of the Jury.
Thematic Sessions

The following sessions followed a common format. Commentators were invited from a number of organisations and agencies relevant to the social and health impacts of alcohol consumption. Each commentator made a short presentation to the group on the work of their parent organisation. The Jury then divided into three sub-groups to discuss the presentation and to formulate questions and points for discussion. It should be noted that the process of deciding on relevant questions to ask was very reliant on the ability of the group leaders to help to formulate and prioritise relevant themes.

There followed a plenary session in which the Jurors questioned the commentator and discussed points of concern.

The most significant disadvantage in terms of the recruitment was the absence of a representative form an alcohol retail organisation. It must be stressed that this was not due to an oversight of the management of the Jury but to a flat refusal by any such organisation to participate. Therefore the point has to be made that one of the main defining and potentially limiting factors to the jury process is the availability of relevant commentators and their ability to articulate relevant points of view. The schedule of topics and commentators was as follows:

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<tr>
<th>Meeting Date</th>
<th>Commentator One</th>
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<td>All Meetings 6.30-8.30pm</td>
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<td>3rd May</td>
<td>First Meeting [no commentators required]</td>
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<td>10th May</td>
<td>Cathy Watson, BwD Public Health</td>
<td>Diane Owen, Alcohol Programme Manager, Lancs Public Health Network</td>
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<td>17th May</td>
<td>Zoe Gatland, LifeLine</td>
<td>Ken Donlon, Creative Support</td>
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<td>24th May</td>
<td>Chris Allen, Public Protection, Environmental Health, Licensing</td>
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<td>31st May</td>
<td>Kim Major BwDNHS Commissioning</td>
<td>Liz Hopkins, Substance Misuse Service Manager</td>
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<td>7th June</td>
<td>Vivien Blackledge, Women’s Aid</td>
<td>Deborah Gornik, Head of Early Intervention, Prevention &amp; Partnerships, Children’s Services, BwD Council</td>
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<td>14th June</td>
<td>Mark Aspin, Head of Community Safety Partnership, BwD</td>
<td>Sgt Mark Cruise, SE Neighborhood Police Team</td>
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<tr>
<td>21st June</td>
<td>Recommendations</td>
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Jurors overwhelmingly found participation in the Citizens' Jury a positive experience. In particular they felt better informed on the range of alcohol abuse services available to the local community:

The sessions were very informative… there are lots of groups and voluntary organisations that I didn’t know were there. There was also information on the local council and PCT groups. [Juror 1]

I enjoyed the speakers and found them very informative. I was shocked at times with the figures, for example male domestic abuse and other figures. [Juror 3]

At the end of the project there was a consensual agreement that the Jury should continue as a community group to support interventions in alcohol abuse on the estate:

I have really enjoyed this group. It was interesting and very informative. I think it will be an asset to the community if the group keeps going. [Juror 3]

It would be good if the group could still meet on a regular basis. [Juror 4]

We think we will carry on with the group. [Juror 5]

Benefits to participating organisations.

The Jury was essentially a process of two-way communication and commentators found the process informative and useful:

I found the second part of the session really useful was by the residents presented us with questions which generated debate. This although challenging was informative.

I learnt great deal, I gained insight into the personal experiences of Shadsworth residents and I would like to thank them for that.

It was a new experience for me but I found the question and answer session the most useful and enjoyable.

The Jury exercised a positive effect on the provision of alcohol abuse services at Shadsworth; commentators reported that Juror’s comments would influence future service provision:

It [the Citizen's Jury] has made me re-consider how we advertise alcohol service provision.

I know the service is going to look at ways in which they can utilize community groups more effectively to promote their services. I have met with the service managers since the Citizen Jury session and this was discussed.

I have fed back to my service and would like to explore the opportunity of us perhaps having a room to offer our services from i.e., triage, clinical sessions within the community setting.
The management of the Jury

There was a unanimous view amongst the Jurors that the project had been well managed. In particular Jurors felt that the sessions – which had all been co-ordinated and facilitated by three members of staff of Blackburn with Darwen Healthy Living, had been well led. Jurors appreciated the combination of a friendly and collegiate approach with a structured management of each session. Some jurors expressed the view that they would like the same people to be involved in mentoring and supporting the group should it be able to continue.

Conclusions and recommendations

Overall the Shadsworth Citizen’s Jury on Alcohol Abuse was a successful intervention on several accounts. First, it provided a forum in which a number of residents of the Shadsworth Estate were able to combine to address a shared problem. Not all the jurors knew each other prior to their recruitment, so the jury was not only an effective method of bringing together people with a shared interest but it also provided a forum in which individuals discovered that they were not alone in experiencing problems through alcohol abuse. Second, the jury enabled people to share their experiences with others in an open but secure environment. Not all had experienced the same type of concern – some lived with an alcoholic family member, some experienced anti-social behaviour from neighbours while others joined through fear of their own children being lured into under-age alcohol consumption. This element of the jury process served to demonstrate the many harmful impacts of alcohol abuse upon individuals and communities.

A salient feature of the exercise was the fact that most of the jurors were unaware of the existence of many of the organisations that were represented by ‘witness’ speakers. It should be of concern that organisations possessing the skills and resources to support those experiencing harm from alcohol abuse were invisible to the people who most need their help. In this respect the jury was useful in raising awareness of the full range of support available to them. There were variations between the speakers. Some adhered to a methodical and limited account of the work of their respective organisation and might have done more to orientate the presentation to the immediate locality of Shadsworth. It seemed on some occasions that speakers had a standardised organisational presentation from which they could or would not deviate, focussing on rationale and process rather than on what could be done in practical terms at Shadsworth. In contrast, others engaged more directly with the purpose of the jury, focusing on Shadsworth and in one case apologising for not having
made contact on the estate previously. The quality of the invited commentators is thus important to a successful citizen’s jury.

Arguably the most important factor in the success of the citizen’s jury was the quality of the input of the facilitation team. The same three staff members of Blackburn with Darwen Healthy Living presented each session and thus were able to develop a rapport with the members of the jury. The delivery of the intervention was appreciated unanimously by the jurors as being supportive, inclusive, respectful, friendly and encouraging. It is highly likely that the high retention rate was heavily dependent on the aptitude of the facilitators; certainly many of the comments made by the jurors would support this assertion.

Nothing better reflects the success of the Shadsworth Citizen’s Jury than the fact that enough jurors desired to sustain the group beyond the end of the intervention. There was a view amongst the jurors that the group had momentum, was better informed of relevant services as a result of the jury and had developed confidence that things could be improved through community intervention. However, enthusiasm alone will not enable a transfer of responsibility and agency to an emergency community group without a period of interim support. The group would need training in areas such as meetings facilitation and corporate communication as well as basic resources such as a meetings venue, a budget and access to a network of advice and support. The strong recommendation of the evaluation team is that a bridging period of support should be given to the group to help it become established as a semi-autonomous body working as a local partner organisation of Blackburn with Darwen Healthy Living. In the current climate a financial resource to support the group would clearly be difficult to find but what is perhaps more urgently needed, if the sustainability of the jury is to be achieved, are support, advice and encouragement to maintain the enthusiasm and determination of this newly formed community action group.
References

Aldred, R. (2011) ‘From community participation to organizational therapy? World café and Appreciative Inquiry as research methods’ Community Development Journal, 36 (1) pp. 57-71


