

Schools of Participation

Sharing experiences, learning skills, being more effective and working with others to bring about change

Why use this method

Target Groups:

It can be used with a wide range of groups, and has been used successfully with refugees and people seeking asylum, homeless men, people with sensory disabilities, Asian women and people with learning disabilities.

Individual Outcomes:

Participants gain confidence and re-establish existing skills. They improve their listening and negotiating skills and are likely to become involved in campaigns on issues that affect them and their communities. They leave the School eager to create a better community.

Outcomes for community relations:

As the group on the School are individual representatives of their organisations, they take their learning and newfound confidence back to their respective groups. They also take their collaborative skills to an organisational level to work with other groups in their area. They are determined to have dialogues with all those who wish to make changes in their communities.

Civil Participation:

Groups from the School have gone on to work with large service providers such as the police and social housing organisations to address the concerns uncovered by the group.

Valuing achievement:

Giving the School accreditation through a university provides the group with facilities available to other students, and results in certificates being awarded to value the achievement of the participants.

Schools of Participation provide a place for people to share experiences and learn and plan actions to have more control over what is happening in their lives and in their area.

The Schools aim to strengthen the capacity of individuals and local groups to have a greater say, be mobilised and take action to improve their communities.



How to use this method

- The Schools are based on a participatory action-learning process where formal sessions are combined with practical activities
- The curriculum is designed with the participants to make sure it responds to their needs
- Time, venue and number of sessions are agreed with participants
- Numbers can range from 8 to 15 participants
- Trainers work as facilitators supporting learners through their learning process
- The learning process is fun and full of action

Steps to using this method:

1. The course facilitator draws together representatives from community organisations.
2. A list of issues are drawn up from the organisations, which are then prioritised in agreement with all parties involved.
3. Among the group members decide on a venue, dates and times for meetings for the School of Participation to take place.
4. Explore the issues decided upon earlier in the process using various techniques and exercises, ranging from discussion, participatory exercises on power, listening skills and communication, to forum theatre techniques to help clarify issues.
5. Ensure that the School is participant-led through a combination of evaluation exercises and reflective discussion with the group and the staff, and that sessions are planned as the School progresses to ensure that the pace and content are correct for the needs of the group.
6. Alongside skill-enhancing activities, include practical information on any topics that surround the issues being explored in the School, e.g. power structures and accountability chains in housing provision and the local council. This allows the group to draw up plans for action to begin to tackle the issues central to the group and the community it represents.
7. Remember that the two elements: skill enhancing and practical action planning, combine to make a decisive and assertive group.

Example

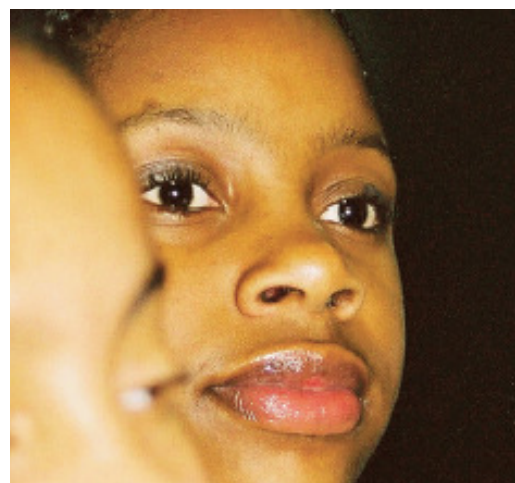
Community Pride, the delivery agents for the Schools of Participation approached Salford CVS to set up a forum in Salford for refugees and people seeking asylum. It found that although there were several existing groups working in Salford, none of them felt that their work was being as effective as it could be. It was therefore decided that each group would send one or more representatives to a school of participation to enable them to develop their skills to become better campaigners and take more effective action on issues that were important to them.

After several meetings with the different groups it was felt that the issues that refugees and people seeking asylum were facing in Salford were wide-ranging and that the methods used in a school of participation would help to focus these issues down to a manageable amount. This created an effective campaign as a starting point for further action. This resulted in the group forming its own forum separate to Salford CVS.

In their own words: participant comment from the South Asian school

“Since I came to the school of participation my whole life has changed; you have taught me to know myself better than before. I always wanted to network with service providers and other RCOs you have made this happen for me thank you all! I don’t have enough words to say thank you to all the wonderful mentors, teachers, friends.

Today is the happiest day of my life, you know why? Because this group has made impossible things possible through networking together forever.”



Further information

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