

# Making waves in Walsall:

Learning from the success of the Participatory Appraisal Network



The main findings of this report come from two evaluations of the Walsall PA Network; *Evaluation of the Walsall Participatory Appraisal Network*, Philip Scott Jones, Elizabeth Awate and Griffin Zgambo, December 2002 and *Implementing Local Strategic Partnerships: can Participatory Appraisal Networks Help? Participatory Appraisal and the Walsall Borough Strategic Plan*, March 2003 by Elizabeth Awate, Griffin Zgambo and Philip Scott Jones from the Centre for International Development and Training at the University of Wolverhampton.

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With thanks to members of the Walsall Participatory Appraisal Network, particularly Eleanor Chell and Paul Hartill, the Network's Co-ordinators.

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Cover photo: Walsall PA Network

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## Acknowledgements

We thank all those who gave their time and energy to complete questionnaires, participate in meetings and interviews and share information about their experiences and impressions. In particular we thank staff of the Electric Palace and Walsall Primary Care Trust for their collegiality and guidance throughout the evaluation process. The views expressed in this report are not necessarily those of Oxfam, the Electric Palace, Walsall Primary Care Trust or others in the PA Network.

## Acronyms

CAHAL	Caldmore Area Housing Association Limited
CIDT	Centre for International Development and Training
HAZ	Health Action Zone
LSP	Local Strategic Partnership
OCN	Open College Network
OFSTED	Office for Standards in Education
PA	Participatory Appraisal
PCT	Primary Care Trust (formerly Walsall Health Authority)
PRA	Participatory Rural Appraisal
SSI	Semi Structured Interviews
SUN	Service Users Network
WBSP	Walsall Borough Strategic Partnership
WLLA	Walsall Lifelong Learning Alliance

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## Taking a risk: Why PA in Walsall?

*" I have learned how to look at problems and find solutions. "*

Ken Webster, representative on the Walsall Service User Council.

In a small corner of England, in a town which ranks among the most deprived in the country, something exciting has been happening. Something that 'helps us understand the world we live in and make it better,' says Angela, one of the people involved.

That something has helped people 'learn how to look at problems and find

solutions.' It has given people confidence, included those who had previously felt excluded, and widened and extended people's knowledge. And what is more, they have enjoyed themselves in the process.

That something is Participatory Appraisal, often known as PA. It is a way of working with communities to involve them in decision-making. Since it was first used in Walsall in 1997 in a small project working with young people, it has become the basis for a network comprising of 40 partners. The Walsall Participatory Appraisal Network has trained nearly 160 people in PA who are then able to go back to their organisations and train others. No two PAs are ever the same; the approach is ever-changing as people adapt its tools to their different situations in education, or health, or working with young people. It is, as Amarjot Birdi, a Health Improvement Officer, put it, **'practice developing theory.'**

This report looks at the work of the Network. It examines where and why people in so many different walks of life have found PA useful, and how it has contributed to Walsall's Local Strategic Partnership. It explains what has been useful, what the problems have been, and gives some guidelines for others in the UK who would like to use Participatory Appraisal in their own work.

Karen Wright is Head of Health Development and Regeneration in Walsall. She says that to get PA off the ground meant taking risks:

**'PA was seen as a new and untested idea. Its promoters needed to have enough belief and understanding to know that it could work...they needed to take a risk.'**

As this report will show, in Walsall, this proved to be a risk worth taking.

## What is participatory appraisal?

Participatory Appraisal was first used with rural communities overseas.<sup>1</sup> It has only recently started being used in the UK. PA methodology is designed to involve people, particularly from communities that are socially excluded, in decisions that affect their lives.

PA combines a variety of visual methods or ‘tools’ with group work and semi-structured interviewing techniques.<sup>2</sup> The idea is to enable local people to share their perceptions and identify, prioritise and appraise issues from their unique perspective and knowledge of local conditions. In this way, local people are seen as experts on their own lives and their views become the starting point for local planning and action. The use of PA reinforces key principles of community participation and ownership.

The beauty of PA is that the tools can be used with large or small groups, on any topic, and with a wide range of different people, from the grassroots to decision-makers, regardless of age, sex, ethnicity, literacy or ability.

### The underlying principles

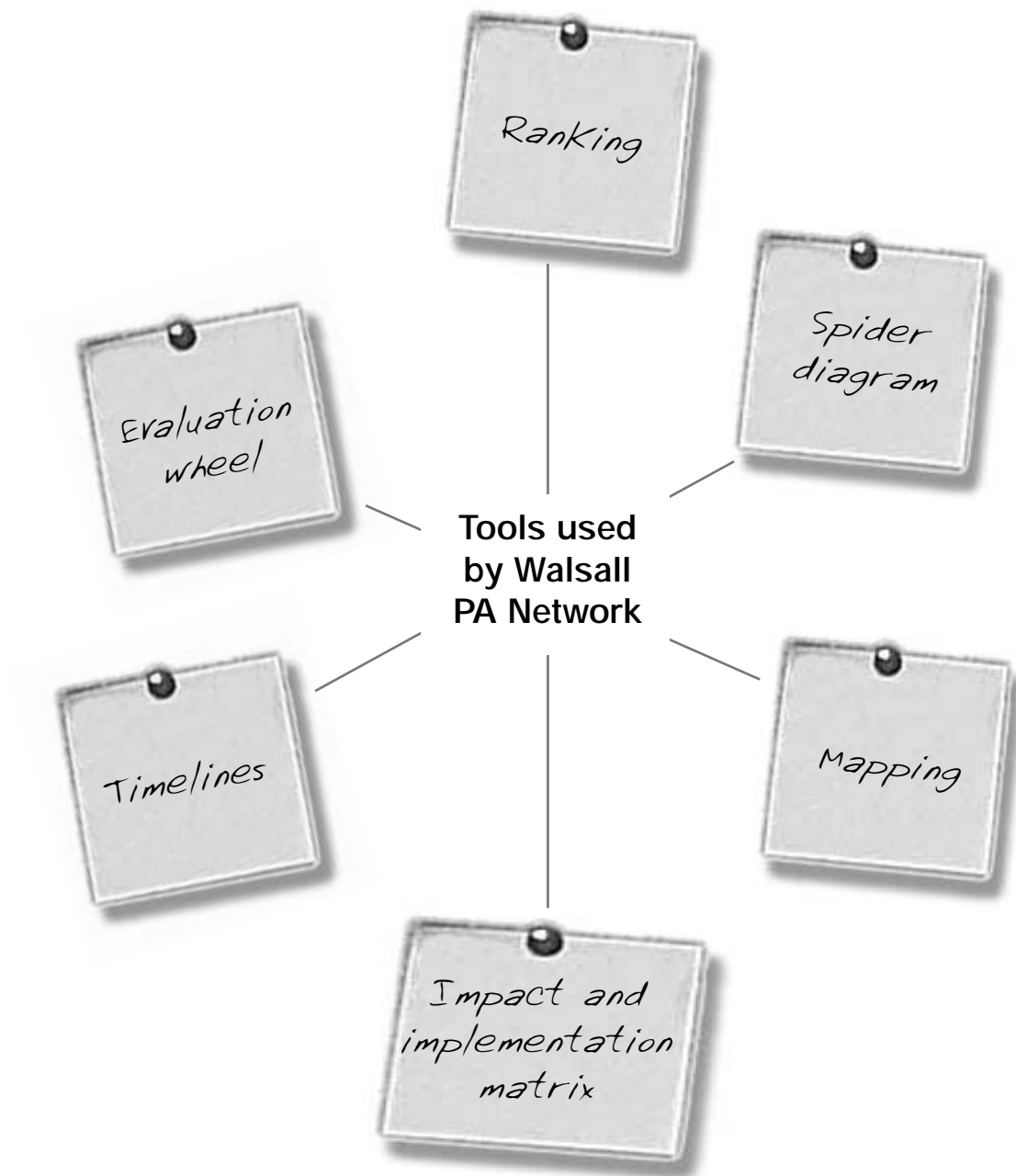
- The need to recognise, and work with, the knowledge and experience of local people.
- The need for local people to have more say and control in the development process.
- The need to understand the context of such development for different groups and the constraints on people’s participation.
- Rapid progressive learning.
- ‘Optimal ignorance’ and ‘appropriate imprecision’ – not finding out more than is needed, and not trying to measure more accurately than needed, or what does not need to be measured.

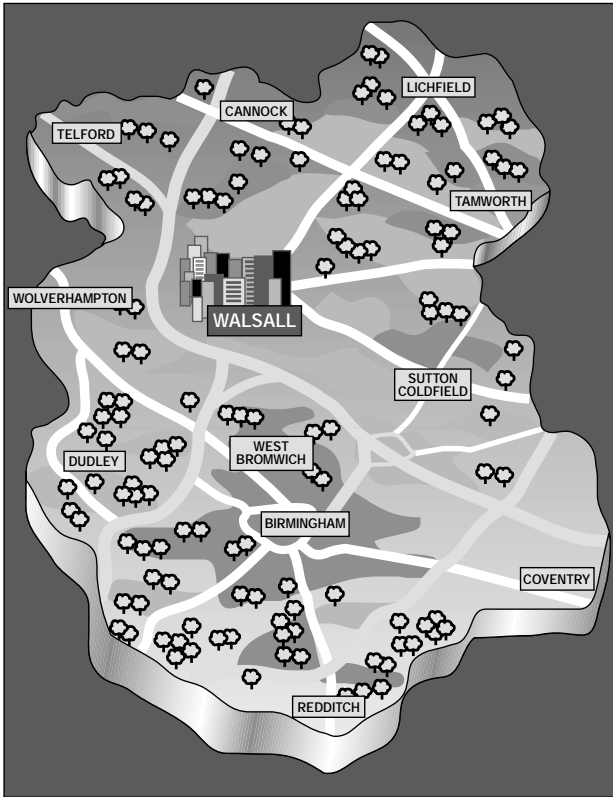
<sup>1</sup> PA is also, rather confusingly, sometimes known as Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA), Participatory Urban Analysis (PUA) and Participatory Learning and Action (PLA).

<sup>2</sup> See Appendix 1 for more details of the tools.

## PA tools

A range of PA tools was used in initial training in Walsall, and by participants in their organisations after training. For more details on these see Appendix 1. Those most commonly used by the Walsall PA Network were:





### 3 The Walsall context

Walsall is one of seven Metropolitan Boroughs in the West Midlands, covering about 40 square miles with a population of about 254,000. Birmingham is about 10 miles south, Wolverhampton about eight miles west and the M6 motorway runs west and south of Walsall town. Compared to national averages, Walsall has lower than average income, and higher rates of unemployment, infant mortality, teenage pregnancy and drug misuse.

- Nine of the Borough's 20 wards (about 115,000 people) are in the top ten of Britain's most deprived wards.
- The Borough ranks 54th on England's Multiple Deprivation Index (where 1 is the most deprived and 356 is the least deprived).<sup>3</sup>
- About 10% of Walsall's residents are from ethnic minorities.<sup>4</sup>
- The reported rate of crime has increased over the past 10 to 30 years. Although recent statistics indicate that crime rates have stabilised, with a notable reduction in house burglary and vehicle crime in the past three years, the overall crime rate remains 22% above the national average. A number of local agencies report that abuse of drugs, youth crime and prostitution are also increasing.
- In 1999, standards in Walsall schools were found to be below national average.<sup>5</sup>
- However, there are three community education colleges and adult education in Walsall has become one of the successful models of community education in the country.

<sup>3</sup> West Midlands Public Health Observatory, 2002.

<sup>4</sup> Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council, 2003; OFSTED, 2002; Walsall Borough Strategic Partnership, 2002.

<sup>5</sup> Government News Network, [www.gnn.gov.uk](http://www.gnn.gov.uk)



## Walsall Local Strategic Partnership

Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council has developed a Local Strategic Partnership through which they and partner agencies are addressing a number of issues, some of them longstanding, relating to social and economic regeneration. Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs) have been established in the 88 English Local Authorities that receive Government Neighbourhood Renewal Funding.

The Walsall Borough Strategic Partnership's vision is that:

**'Walsall will be a prosperous, inclusive and competitive Borough in which its diverse communities feel involved, safer, healthier and can take pride in its future.'**

Of particular concern for the WBSP is how to address education issues, after strongly worded, negative OFSTED<sup>6</sup> reports on education in the Borough in December 1999 and April 2002.

The WBSP has six themes:

- 1 Regenerating the economy
- 2 Raising educational standards through lifelong learning
- 3 Improving health, well-being and social care
- 4 Improving community safety
- 5 Sustaining a better place to live and work
- 6 Enhancing community participation

Education, transport and crime are some of the issues that the people and organisations in the Walsall PA Network are addressing through a variety of PA activities.

<sup>6</sup> The Office for Standards in Education that inspects schools

## 4 The Walsall PA Network

*PA is very interesting and informative, it's very accessible to everyone, whatever their ability and it is a relaxed way of gathering information.*

Sorana Hammonds, family support worker for Sure Start in the Blakenall area of Walsall

In the mid-1990s, the University of Hull was working to adapt PA tools in a teenage pregnancy and sexual health project. In 1996, Hull staff trained Eleanor Chell and Daren Garratt, who were employed by Hull University but based at WALKWAYS – Walsall Youth Projects. They established the PA Network in 1997/98.

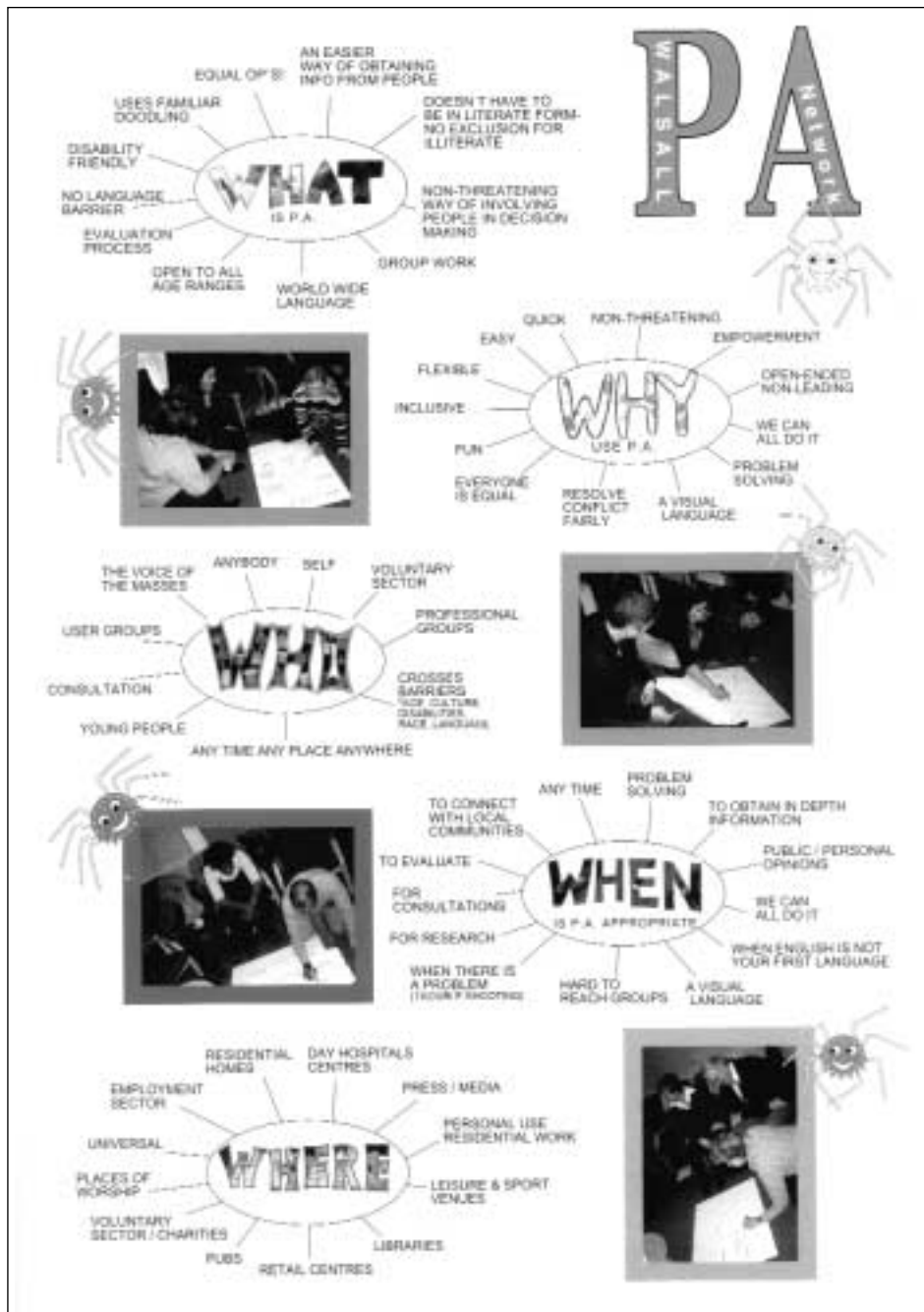
Since then the Network has grown to include 40 groups and organisations.<sup>7</sup>

It is coordinated from the Electric Palace, which hosts the T P Riley Community Association's education and advice centre for young people (now known as the Bloxwich Community Partnership). Network funding comes from the Walsall Primary Care Trust (PCT). Walsall's Health Action Zone (HAZ) fund has had a budgeted theme, 'Empowering Local People to Improve Health' from which an annual contract has been given to the T P Riley Community Association to fund a part-time worker to coordinate the Network and support and deliver training to service users within Walsall.

The PA Network delivers training in participatory methodologies. It supports people who have been trained, undertakes consultation projects, supports Network members, facilitates consultation workshops and offers expert advice in participatory methodology.

Training consists of a five-day training package in participatory methodologies and how to use PA tools. It is predominantly undertaken with service users and providers, including those from mental health, learning disability and physical disability. Training is adapted to suit the needs of different clients and funding agencies, for example the Government's New Deal for Communities Neighbourhood Renewal initiative, Surestart, and the Health Start Walsall HAZ local initiative.

<sup>7</sup> An account of some of the Network's early activities and impacts may be found in a special issue of PLA notes, June 2000, volume 38 (Kate Gant, 2000: 29-31; Jeanne Nicholls and Katie Watson, 2000: 37-40; Daren Garratt and Caroline Stokes, 2000: 41-43), International Institute for Environment and Development, [www.iied.org](http://www.iied.org)



*From Walsall PA Network outreach brochure.*

Although the Network's Coordinating Unit at the Electric Palace has a hierarchical structure, the flexibility of the Network relies heavily on managers who retain a participatory approach in their work.

Operationally, the Network has a collegial structure where trainers share similar levels of authority and responsibilities, allowing considerable flexibility in carrying out the programme. This model offers good opportunities for effective communication and information sharing among Network members. Most PA training and follow-up work takes place outside the Electric Palace at community venues.

The agencies and groups that are part of the Network embrace a wide variety of missions and activities including:

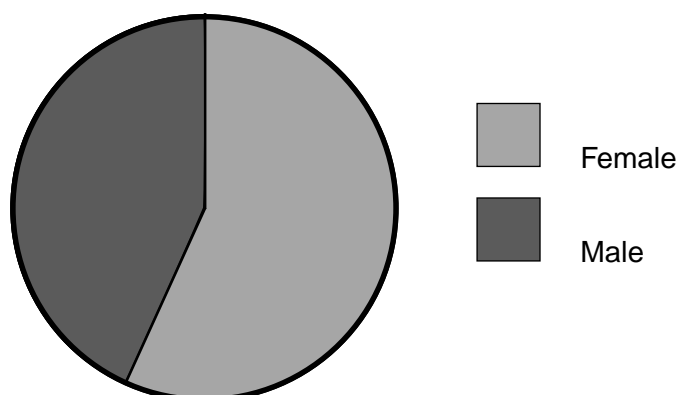
- Social inclusion for people with disabilities
- Mental health service users and supporters
- Quality of life for local people
- Community participation
- Health and well-being
- Housing
- Arts
- Arthritis self help
- Young persons' groups
- Regeneration and community improvement
- Education, skills training, and lifelong learning
- Parent support for employment and childcare training, and
- Social, cultural and educational development of minority groups.

## Numbers trained

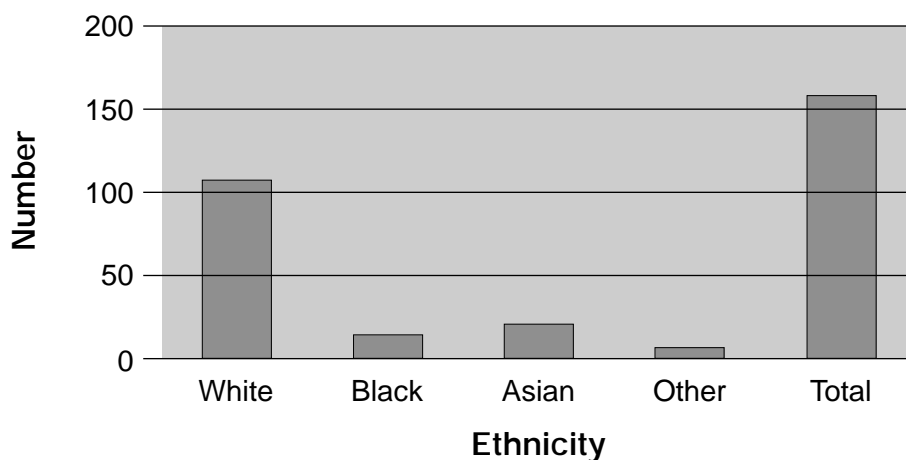
Walsall PA Network has trained almost 160 people (Table 1), 10 of whom were registered disabled. These have been categorised by employment status, gender, ethnicity and the different organisations they represent – see Figures 1 and 2 and Table 1 right.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup> *Evaluation of the Walsall Participatory Appraisal Network*, Elizabeth Awate, Griffin Zgambo and Scott Jones from the Centre for International Development and Training at the University of Wolverhampton, December 2002

**Figure 1: Number of people trained by gender**



**Figure 2: Number of people trained by ethnicity**



Category of trainees	Number
Employed	119
Registered unemployed	8
Unwaged	19
Self employed	1
Registered disabled	10
Retired	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>159</b>

**Table 1: Summary of number and categories of trainees in the Walsall PA Network**

## 5

## Using PA in the Walsall Borough Strategic Partnership

The Walsall PA Network's successes have clearly filled a gap in the methods 'tool kit' of a number of statutory and voluntary agencies in Walsall. This section examines the PA Network's activities in relation to three themes of the Walsall Borough Strategic Plan:

- Raising educational standards through lifelong learning
- Improving health, well-being and social care
- Sustaining a better place to live and work.

### 5.1 Raising educational standards through Lifelong Learning

The Borough's lead partner in this theme is the Walsall Lifelong Learning Alliance, or WLLA. Other key partners include the Learning Skills Council (LSC), local colleges and schools, and private sector and community representatives.

The WLLA is a member of 'The Learning Kitchen,' a Black Country partnership aiming to improve basic skills, and of EQUAL, a European programme, with partners in Sweden, Finland and Portugal. EQUAL is examining innovative ways of delivering basic skills, assisting disadvantaged people with employment and improving the skills of those currently employed.

The WLLA hosted the last day of an EQUAL Conference at Walsall's new Art Gallery in October at which Network staff from the Electric Palace facilitated an event about using PA to identify learners' needs. This proved so valuable that European delegates and WLLA are now exploring how to use PA within EQUAL.

The WLLA also sees PA as an important element in taking a number of its other projects forward. It states that it will 'use the PA Network to undertake research for 'Voice of the Learner', an activity to identify barriers to learning and learners' needs.

Colin Robinson is WLLA's Lifelong Learning Officer:

**'We are trying to get the *Voice of the Learner Project* off the ground – what are people's barriers to learning? Why are they not continuing from school or getting back into some form of learning post-school? People used to think it was about transport and childcare, but maybe that's not all. For some people it's more about security and how close the bus stop is to a learning venue at 9.00pm on a winter's night. People want to know there is a police presence in specific areas. PA can help us understand these things and take action.'**

The WLLA sees PA as useful to identify needs, gather information and possibly list and rank 'solutions.' As with other agencies in the Network, there has been little discussion so far of how PA may actually be used during implementation, or for monitoring and for evaluation.

**'What techniques are you going to use to identify people's needs? PA stops us making assumptions. With questionnaires we only got answers to the questions we asked. With PA, the people give you new questions and much more useful answers. But there is a real skill involved in achieving the right environment to help people talk about problems. Take domestic violence for example – you really need to get the right person to do the PA.'**

For the WLLA, PA brings proven, practical responses to policies and programme strategies for the Alliance and the WBSP, filling gaps in the Alliance's approaches to partnership with learners and those who experience barriers to learning.

## **5.2 Improving health, wellbeing and social care**

Walsall's Primary Care Trust (PCT, formerly Walsall Community Health Trust and Walsall Health Authority) is the lead agency for this theme.

The Service Users' Network of Walsall Mental Health Services (SUN) is one of the community health groups and voluntary organisations that are the key partners in the theme. SUN is a network of over 100 people in the community, and people at day hospitals, drop-in centres, day centres, rehabilitation units and acute and intensive care wards.

Using PA alongside other approaches, SUN, together with the PCT, Walsall Social Services and the Walsall Service User Council, has co-produced an agreement and strategy document entitled *Service User Involvement in Walsall Mental Health Services*. This agreement links with the other WBSP partners' strategies including the PCT's Strategic Service Development Plan and Walsall's Health Improvement Plan.

The development of SUN was one of the early outcomes of the initial training in PA, a process that has been described by Walsall PCT and Nottingham's Queen's Medical Centre staff.<sup>9</sup>

A series of meetings to discuss the Borough's Mental Health Strategy led to the 'Have Your Say Day', a one-day event for users, carers and health professionals. This has become locally famous as an example of good practice and the use of PA in helping users of health services shape policy, strategy and actions.

It has had several important impacts, including:

- An agreement and strategy document that includes:
  - Agency commitments to information provision, advocacy, funding for SUN (who represent service users), practical support, further training and performance management.
  - SUN commitments to ensure support and information for groups it represents and accountability within a representative structure.
- The employment of SUN workers in using PA for research and evaluation projects, such as those for Age Concern Day Centres, Bloxwich Hospital Day Care services, the Sainsbury Centre for Mental Health, Dorothy Pattison Hospital, and Walsall Crisis Outreach service.
- The involvement of SUN in producing a Mental Health Map and Resource Guide with the PCT, Council and Walsall College.
- Community outreach supported by the production of a leaflet about the SUN.
- The use of PA by the SUN in one-day meetings to examine and address issues facing service users in various facilities.

<sup>9</sup> 'The use of the qualitative research methodology tool 'Participatory Appraisal' with Mental Health Service users, as a method of consultation and community capacity building', Nicholls, Jeanne, and Watson, Katie, 2000, *PLA Notes* 38, June 2000:37-40, IIED, London.



The development and sustained involvement of SUN has advanced Walsall PCT's Health Action Zone (HAZ) goals and enabled service users in Walsall to be fully involved in mental health strategy and actions.

Stella Spragg is SUN's chairperson:

**'I've been using PA since 1998. I'm trained in PA although not yet trained as a trainer. We undertook joint training with professionals and used PA to get a constitution. Now we use PA with other groups.'**

Although considerable progress has been made, and SUN is now accepted as a legitimate, properly constituted organisation representing service users, there are a number of barriers. Given current capacities in the PA Network, it is not clear how proactive the Network can be in providing additional training and support for SUN. Funding also is an issue.

**'We have to find ways of reaching more people in the community. We also need to improve services and even if SUN has support and backing of the health professionals and agencies, funding is difficult.'**

Nevertheless, the development of SUN represents a model of outreach and engagement with Walsall constituents, whose personal lives have improved and whose contributions to the other community groups have been enhanced through PA. It is also an example that illustrates how PA may add value to the health and well-being and the community participation themes of the WBSP. It can go beyond being a creative response to consultation, and be used to engage people in the whole process.

## 5.3 Sustaining a better place to live and work

Caldmore Area Housing Association Limited (CAHAL) is the largest 'traditional' Housing Association based in Walsall Borough and one of the key partners in the WBSP 'Sustaining a Better Place to Live and Work' theme, for which Walsall Council is the lead agency. Other partners for this theme include other housing associations, the Environment Agency, the Council for Voluntary Services and Advantage West Midlands. Strategies that address the theme, which in addition to housing include Local Agenda 21, Transport, Environment and Community Participation Strategies.

Although CAHAL now has nearly 2,000 properties and 150 staff, the Association is also concerned with issues relating to local environments, economy and employment. It has three mental health service schemes, a women's refuge, a young persons' scheme, services for elderly Asian groups, young parents and people with learning disabilities, and a drop-in centre for those leaving care. About 10,000 people walk in to CAHAL's office each year seeking advice or assistance.

A key aspect of CAHAL's work is assessing people's needs in these various areas and managing and improving housing stock in line with demand. Irene Casserley has been with CAHAL for 20 years and is quality audit manager and ombudsman.

**'We started using PA to get feedback from customers, how they feel (in supported housing) and what they want. We found PA worked far better than questionnaires, keeping the issues real and actionable. A simple example that came up was food – we could trace the problem, take action and improve the service. In a questionnaire, if the question isn't asked, you don't get an answer, but in PA, people help to set the questions that are important to them.'**

CAHAL is keen to mainstream the use of PA within the organisation, seeing it not only as an approach to data collection but as a means of addressing organisational culture and change management.

**'It's not just about information, but a way of working, a whole new way of talking with our customers. We have now written PA training as an action for budgeting, to increase training and then create a network of trainers within the organisation. That way, if we need something done we can call upon someone inside the Association. We have a PA slot at the staff conference and in team meetings. The Housing Director, Housing Manager and Care Standards Group are all keen and see it not as something we want to do, but something we have to do.'**

**Our Chief Executive is pushing this – we need a quality audit tool. PA can help here too. It is customer-friendly, you can reach people who don't like to write things down; it's fair, non-intrusive and everyone gets involved.'**

Like the Lifelong Learning Alliance, CAHAL is keen to move forward and is in contact with the Network trainers and coordinators at the Electric Palace.

CAHAL staff feel comfortable that they can describe their needs to the trainers and receive PA training. What seems to be required additionally is a training of trainers programme so that the Association can be self-reliant in basic PA skills and receive advanced training after initial skills have become anchored in practice.

CAHAL's vision for PA for the Housing Association also fits well with advancing the PA Network's range and depth, and developing cross-sector links. This is partly because CAHAL has formal links with other strategies and agencies, and partly because of the way the WBSF is structured. For example, if an agency the size of CAHAL uses PA routinely, the skills and confidence gained by a large number of its customers will also advance the WBSF theme: 'Enhancing community participation'.

## 6 The impact of PA work

“ We have found Participatory Appraisal techniques invaluable... both when working with groups and with individuals, ”

Daren Garratt and Caroline Stokes,  
WALKWAYS (Walsall Youth Projects)<sup>10</sup>

An evaluation of the Walsall PA Network found<sup>11</sup> that all those taking part viewed the training positively and felt that they had learned a variety of things that could be applied in their work and lives. There were no negative comments on training content or process, or on learning outcomes.

The evaluation noted that PA training and follow-up has had many impacts on the way people work. These ranged from ways of gathering information, to programme

management and organisational change. While many of these may apply to other forms of training, the respondents had specific thoughts about the nature of the PA and how the benefits of PA training in particular enabled the learning to be applied. They felt that the training had:

**‘Helped in meeting other voluntary groups and exchanging information’; that it ‘allowed active participation and exchange of information’ in an ‘informal yet educational way’ in which people felt ‘relaxed and comfortable.’**

Comments were overwhelmingly positive: **‘It was a well put-together training and gave me a practical opportunity to learn new skills’**, it was **‘well-delivered and simple to follow’**, and **‘Presented in a useful, interesting, friendly way at a pace to suit all participants.’**

Some participants in the evaluation found that it could be used in ways that they had not anticipated: **‘PA can be used to solve issues, even at the family level’**, and **‘PA can be used as a therapeutic tool for people with mental problems.’**

People felt that they had learned a number of things from the training:

- Problem-solving methods, ways of presenting well-reasoned, documented views
- Networking, insight into different ways of carrying out need-driven research at community level
- A wide range of learning activities
- New tools in effective consultation through equal participation

<sup>10</sup> From article in *PLA Notes*, June 2000, IIED, London

<sup>11</sup> *Implementing Local Strategic Partnerships: can Participatory Appraisal Networks Help? Participatory Appraisal and the Walsall Borough Strategic Plan*, March 2003, Elizabeth Awate, Griffin Zgambo and Scott Jones from the Centre for International Development and Training at the University of Wolverhampton.

- New communication skills
- New skills and techniques to work with and support people

However, there were two broad areas of concern.

The **first** related to arrangements with communities – some people were not able to engage fully or use certain tools due to personal problems. It was felt that communities:

- should be met in their locality,
- should be provided with transport fares,
- need advance briefing about the PA programme activities,
- should determine the time and schedule of meetings when doing PA.

Also:

- Someone from the community should facilitate community meetings.
- PA must be adapted to suit people from different professions and must be community friendly.
- It is sometimes difficult for participants from the community to commit time and attention for five continuous days. This can be helped by dividing the five-day course into two days (week one) and three days (week two). This break also gives time for trainees to reflect on the training and tools before applying them.

The **second** area of concern indicated that although most managers are highly supportive of PA, some are reluctant to recognise PA as a part of their organisations' tool kits.

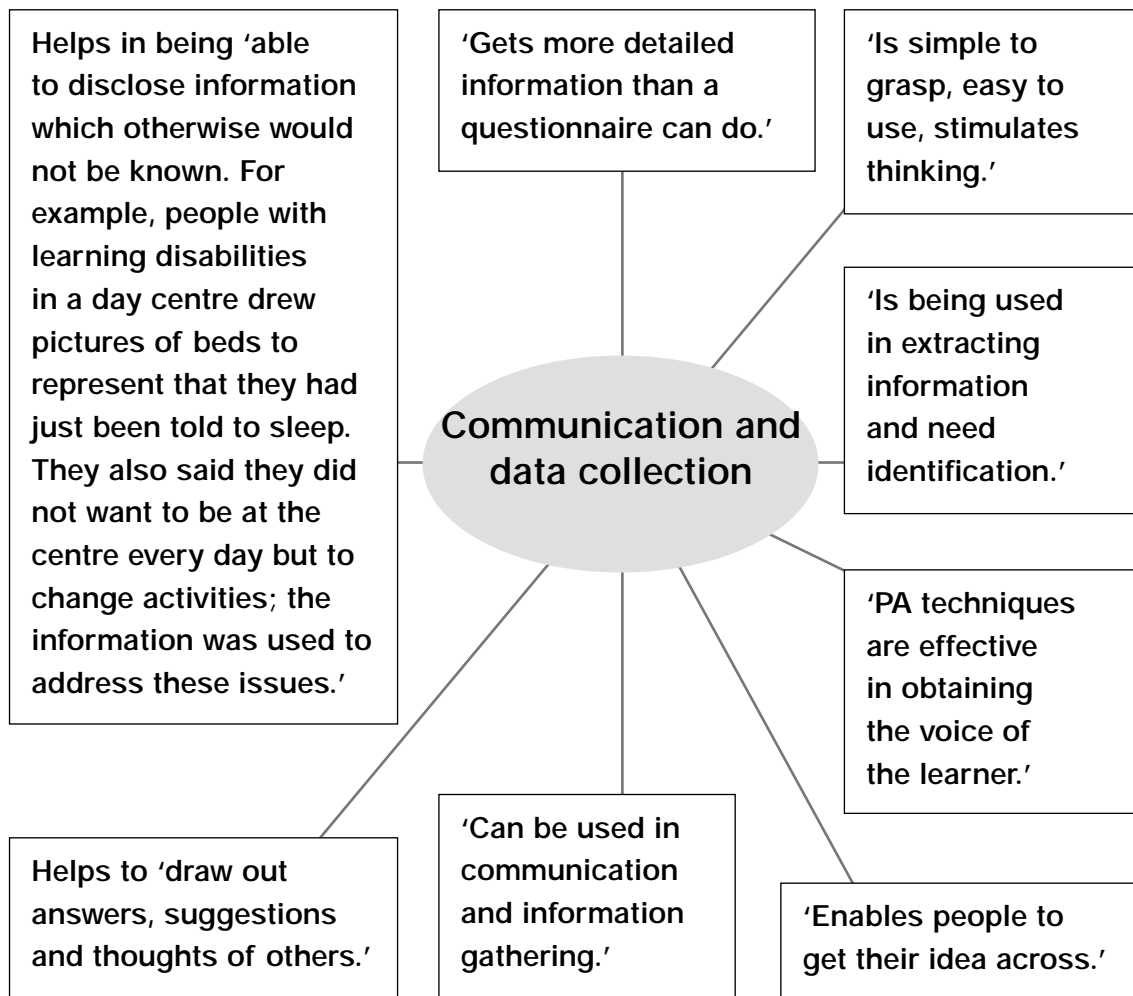
- 'It would be helpful if managers in some organisations attended the training.'
- 'Some people attending training are not interested. They were just forced by the bosses. PA does not work when people are forced to use it. It must come from personal interest.'
- 'Some professionals don't enjoy PA training because it brings people to the same level. They don't want to be challenged or relinquish their power.'
- 'Lack of recognition of PA by decision-makers could reduce the opportunities that PA brings.'
- 'PA groups should be mixed, professionals and non-professionals.'

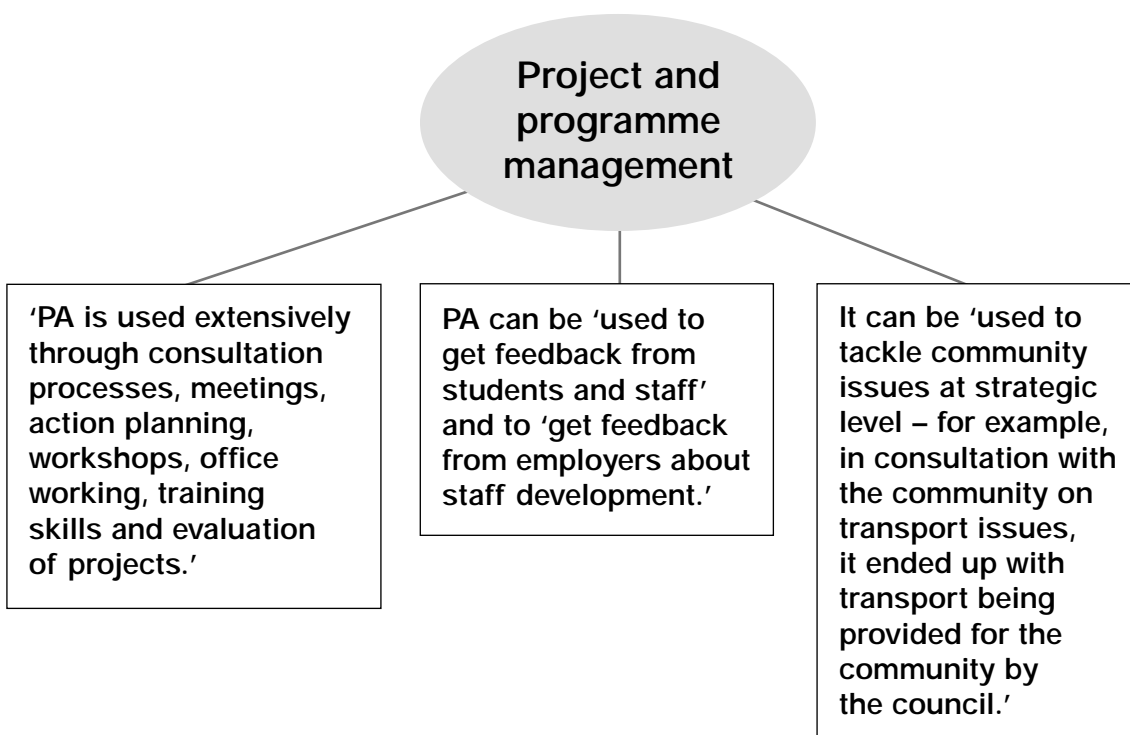
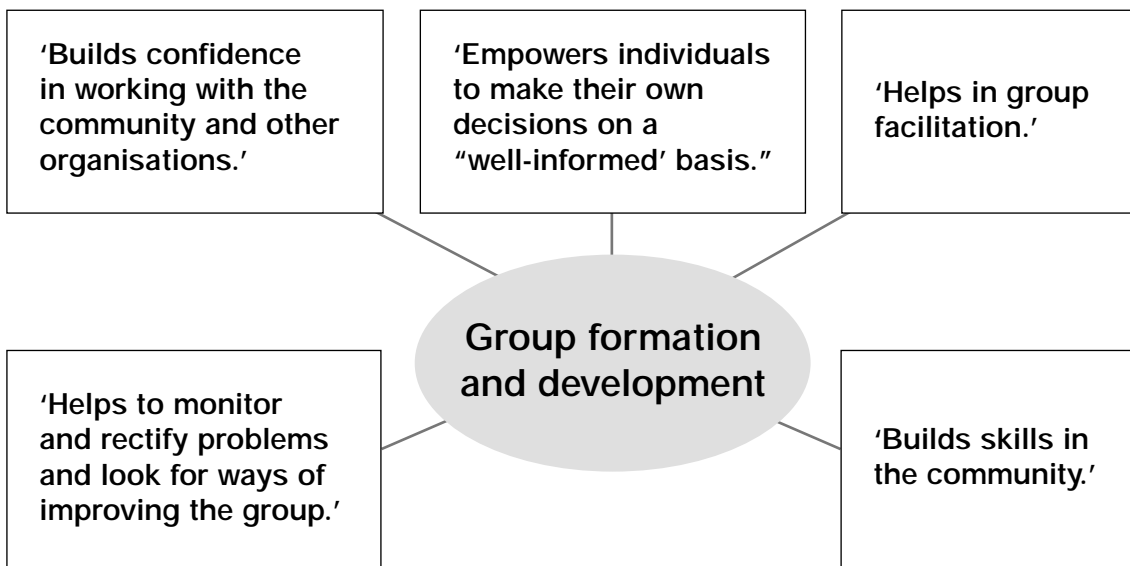
## Positive thoughts and ideas

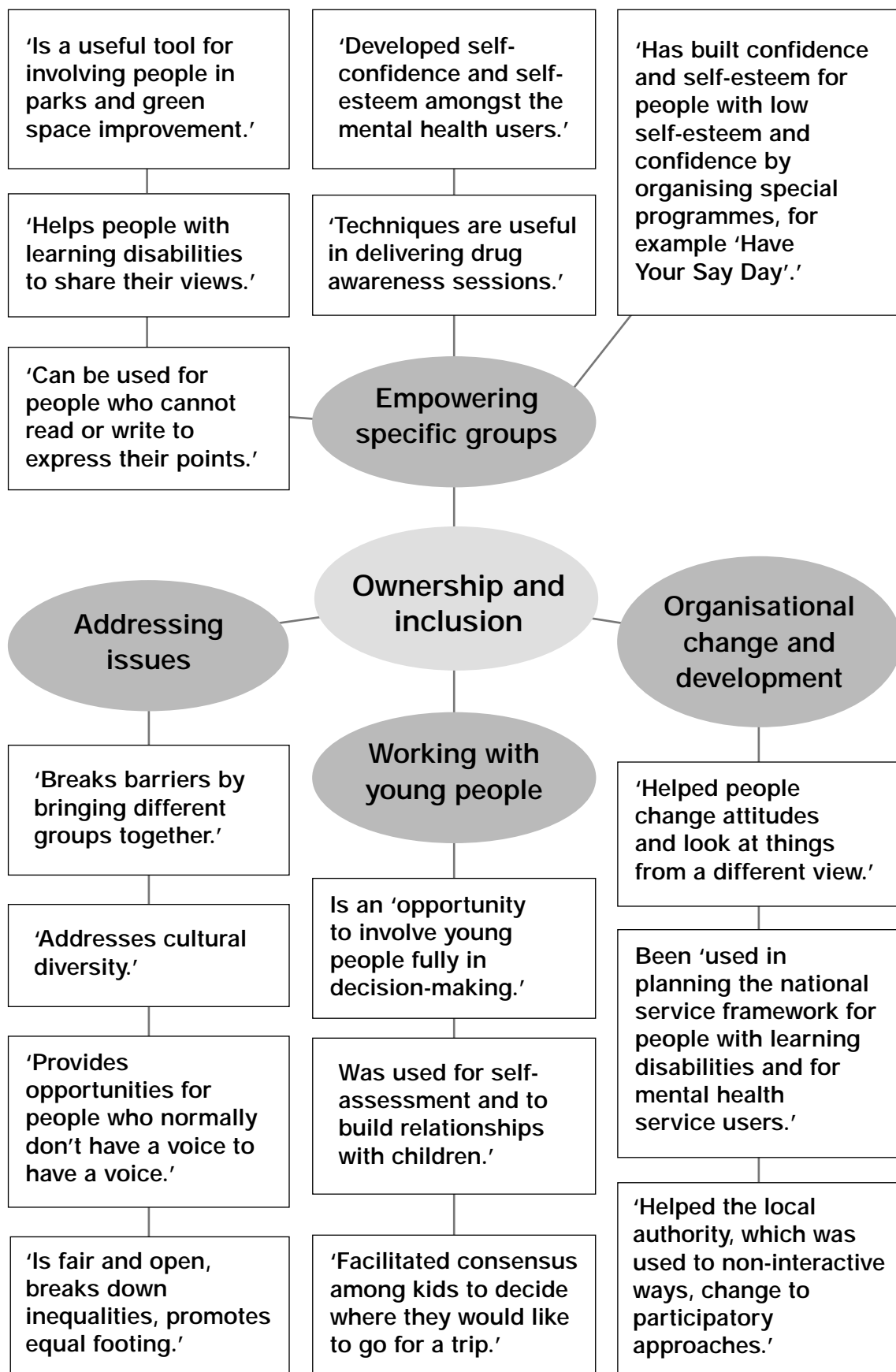
*PA is an enjoyable opportunity to meet new people, share new ideas and innovate new ways of working with and engaging communities in all their diversity. I see it as practice developing theory.*

**Amarjot Birdi,**  
Health Improvement Officer, Dudley

People had a number of different thoughts and ideas on specific aspects of the PA training, from communication and data collection, to group formation and development, project and programme management, ownership and inclusion, and organisational change and development.









## 7

## What made the Walsall PA Network work?

PA is a non-discriminatory approach to involving everyone in making decisions. It's fun, friendly and a valued tool in many settings.

Dawn Hever, centre manager of a supported housing project for people with learning needs.

I think PA helps us to understand the world we live in and how to make it better.

Angela Blair Community Food Development Worker in Birmingham.

A large number of people have had their professional and personal lives enhanced by the work of Walsall PA Network over the past five years. The Network activities have provided exemplary models for community development in a part of Britain that is undergoing rapid change, and where pockets of poverty and disadvantage leave many people vulnerable and excluded. In tackling serious issues of vulnerability, deprivation and exclusion, the Network's founders and practitioners have led by visionary example. There now is considerable potential for the Network to help implement current strategy, in particular for the WBSP to link with the PA approaches that the Walsall PA Network has developed, tested and refined.

Within the Walsall PA Network, PA training met most people's expectations and sometimes exceeded them. Trainees enjoyed the training, which helped build confidence and self-esteem, especially for those with learning disabilities. It often enabled participants to express their views about services and thus begin the process of addressing service provision and improvement.

People also noted that they felt empowered to make their own decisions on issues affecting their lives. Indeed, many people have been applying PA methods in a wide range of situations, not only in their work place but also in their personal life.

Is the Network's success due to the right people coming together at the right time? Or is there something about Walsall's organisational responses to PA opportunities that suggest successes can be replicated elsewhere? The answer seems to be 'yes' to both questions.

There have been two main constraints to the Network's success. One is the limited publicity about, and thus awareness of, PA training. The other is the limited financial resources of the Network which has made it difficult for people to participate, in terms of transport and opportunity costs in attending training sessions.

But people have been very positive about the Network, and there have been a number of practical ideas on these issues and about the Network itself, from those involved in the evaluation. There are some important lessons that can be learned:

## **1. Good partnerships**

The initial drivers and guides for the Network's development were staff in the Walsall PCT, and the Hull University trainers based at WALKWAYS Youth Projects. The Health Development and Regeneration department at the Walsall PCT was instrumental in supporting and funding the PA Network, from idea to implementation. Informal requests for information often came to staff in this department and they frequently linked people seeking training or ideas with PA Network trainers.

## **2. The importance of commitment and constructive support**

The Health Development and Regeneration department are a 'learning team' – a group of people who want to learn, know how to learn, and are supported in that learning by managers who see 'support' as more than a nod of the head. 'Support' for managers and staff in this team means engaging with their colleagues' thinking and development of ideas, and exploring with them how these might fit with policy and strategy.

Karen Wright is Head of Health Development and Regeneration. She says that to get PA off the ground required more than dedicated individuals:

**'The promoters [of PA in Walsall] needed to have enough belief and understanding to know that it could work....they needed to be able to explain the risk to senior managers in ways that made sense.'**

She feels that: **'We've been very lucky to have staff who are so special. I wouldn't underestimate the need for strong interpersonal skills and these have been invaluable when combined with the other skills and people's role in the organisation.'**

It seems obvious to say that to run a Network, you need people who are good at networking, who can understand how other groups might use PA, and who can develop effective partnerships.

### 3. Loose linkages

The loose linkages and organisational structure, and the demand-driven nature of the PA training have contributed in part to the sustainability of PA training and the Network itself. There need to be ways of retaining the advantages of these loose linkages while improving the way in which activities are initiated, implemented, recorded and monitored.

### 4. Specific budgets managed with skill

The Health Development and Regeneration department at the Walsall PCT were also the primary funders of the Network. They used a specified pot of money. In this case the budget came from a specific theme in Walsall's HAZ budget about 'Empowering Local People'. Networking needs time, and this is much more effective with dedicated resources. This was made possible by the fact that the PCT had the vision and the flexibility to fund something that was not exclusively health-focused.

Karen Wright feels that the person managing the money also needs other skills.

**'Apart from demonstrating how the action may link with strategy and policy, they need to be able to handle uncertainty and control risks competently, with sufficient theoretical knowledge of how PA fits in to the big picture.'**

They also need energy, warmth and sincerity, without which personal attributes, the 'skill set' comes across as very mechanical. These qualities have been hallmarks of PCT staff who helped nurture the Network's development.

### 5. Trainers' skills

These professional and inter-personal skills have also been abundant in the Network's trainers. They have needed highly developed inter-personal and professional skills to develop links and manage partnerships. They have also needed large reserves of organisational and professional skills to anchor training in sound needs analysis so that they could tailor PA training to a particular group's needs.

### 6. Good organisational relationships

The organisational relationship between the Network's trainers, coordinators and the PCT staff has been critical to the Network's success. These people needed close and effective communications, especially in the Network's early days. Because the coordinators were experienced field workers with (mainly) youth projects, they were able to develop ideas and identify training needs for these groups, referring suggestions for action to PCT staff.

From the other side, the PCT staff, especially Health Promotion workers who had early links with PA and the emerging Network, were able to refer to the trainers for advice on training and next steps for their own clients.

## **7. Formal and informal links**

In this way, the Network developed its training through (a) informal communications between clients and the PCT or trainers, and (b) through more formal links between the trainers and the PCT who funded, and for its early years, coordinated the emerging Network. This combination of loosely and tightly coupled communications and links proved very effective and also included groups who were not part of the PCT.

## **8. Mutual respect**

Last, but certainly not least, PA is often used to bridge the gap between people in positions of responsibility in organisations, and people in the community. For this, mutual respect is essential.

## 8 Conclusions and recommendations

Through the incorporation of PA exercises into our work, we have witnessed our clients not only begin to understand and make sense of their own issues, but also to identify possible interventions which can assist in the necessary change of lifestyle that so many of them so desperately crave.

**Daren Garratt and Caroline Stokes,**  
WALKWAYS (Walsall Youth Projects).<sup>12</sup>

PA can help combat social isolation and exclusion through providing appropriate training opportunities... Participation in basic PA training can provide increased self-esteem and confidence.

**Jeanne Nicholls and Katie Watson**<sup>13</sup>

These are big claims for the value of PA in Walsall, but they are backed up by the experience of those who have found that the training has indeed made a difference to their lives; people like the mental health user who used to be a doctor and found the confidence to get out and 'dust down my old briefcase to use again'. Or the person who felt that they were finally 'being listened to'.<sup>14</sup> Or the young drug user whom PA has helped reintegrate into society.<sup>15</sup>

Kate Gant, a PA trainer and community arts worker, worked with the Walsall PA Network and the Walsall Community Arts Team. The community they worked with produced a map of the area that gave 'a very clear picture of people's lives.' She notes that 'one of the most important things that came out of the work was local people's strong sense of pride and identity, a key factor for workers outside the area to hear.'

Walsall PA Network and the Community Arts Team are continuing the project, 'developing new and innovative approaches to participatory decision-making, finding ways that enable local people to take the lead, voice their opinions, gain new skills and produce an arts product that can be used to continue the debate.' They are also realising that PA can be used not just for community consultation but in a wide variety of contexts – planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation.

<sup>12</sup> Article in PLA Notes, June 2000, IIED London.

<sup>13</sup> Article in PLA Notes, June 2000, IIED, London

<sup>14</sup> Article by Jeanne Vickers and Katie Watson in PLA Notes, June 2000, IIED, London

<sup>15</sup> Article by Daren Garratt and Caroline Stokes in PLA Notes, June 2000, IIED, London

# Recommendations

The evaluation came up with some key recommendations, some of which are specific to the local context, but others have wider significance. Among these were:

## 1. Wider links with implementation agencies

The lead agencies that are partners in the Walsall Borough Strategic Partnership (including PCT and the WLLA) should have a coordinating role for implementing policy and strategy that could take advantage of untapped potential in the PA Network. For this to happen, the Network needs to be prioritised by, and integrated into, the Partnership. This would require an increase in the Network's resources and possibly a restructuring as well – see Recommendation 5 below.

## 2. Training capacity should be increased

As the Network has grown, there have not been parallel developments in building training capacity. A process for training trainers 'on the job' was a part of the Network's early vision. Daren Garratt, one of the Network's founding trainers, stated **'We wanted others to become shadowers, assist with the next one or two 5-day trainings and then take the reins as paid facilitators with us in support, finally leading the training.'** However, this training 'cascade' has not developed and Electric Palace staff still undertake most PA training. As a result there are training capacity shortfalls (largely related to funding) for organisations such as WLLA and CAHAL who are keen to have training quickly.

## 3. PA should become a part of front-line workers' tool kit

The resources for PA have been minimal and PA has not been mainstreamed in the work of many agencies, even the PCT. The evaluation has shown that PA can provide actionable data that go beyond the data provided by conventional tools of questionnaires, surveys and quantitative methods alone. This is not to say that PA should replace 'traditional' methods. It cannot and should not. But, equally the value of PA tools and approaches ought not to be ignored.

#### **4. Accreditation issues should be re-visited**

The early courses in PA were Open College Network (OCN) accredited, something that provided a sense of achievement, created possibilities for further formal learning, and provided quality assurance. Opportunities for accreditation through the OCN or through NVQ, GNVQ or the University of Wolverhampton would enable these quality assurance and developmental learning issues to be addressed once again. This would also provide a route for training progression and training of trainers to more advanced levels, with appropriate quality assurance for users, employers and funders.

#### **5. Restructuring the Network**

The Network needs to have designated personnel, time and resources with an identity independent from the Electric Palace/Bloxwich Community Partnership (formerly T P Riley Community Association) to ensure success. For this it needs to be established as an independent, self-sustaining organisation with clear terms of reference with aims, objectives and monitoring. To be successful, it needs to be owned by all participants, and for this they need to feel part of the structure. Governance reform might mean that the coordinator is an independent officer, reporting to a board or a committee of people, including users, practitioners, and statutory and voluntary sector managers. A multi-disciplinary governing body (which might be termed a development forum, coordinating committee, or similar) could be responsible for locating a greater diversity of funding, appraisal for the coordinator, and other functions that might be agreed with Network partners.

## Further reading and organisations to contact

### From the report

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### Others

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**SUSTAIN**, 94 White Lion Street, London, N1 9PF  
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## Relevant publications:

### *Evaluation of the Walsall Participatory Appraisal Network*

Philip Scott Jones, Elizabeth Awate and Griffin Zgambo, December 2002, Centre for International Development and Training at the University of Wolverhampton.

### *Have you been PA'd? Using Participatory Appraisal to shape local services*

East End Health Action, Greater Easterhouse Community Health Project, Greater Glasgow NHS Board, Oxfam GB, 2003. Available from Oxfam UK Poverty Programme or can be downloaded from [www.oxfamgb.org/ukpp/resources/index.htm](http://www.oxfamgb.org/ukpp/resources/index.htm).

### *Implementing Local Strategic Partnerships: can Participatory Appraisal Networks Help? Participatory Appraisal and the Walsall Borough Strategic Plan*

Elizabeth Awate, Griffin Zgambo and Philip Scott Jones, March 2003, Centre for International Development and Training, the University of Wolverhampton.

### *Listen Hear: the right to be heard*

The report of the Commission on Poverty, Participation and Power, The Policy Press and the UK Coalition Against Poverty, 2000. Available from Marston Book Services, PO Box 269, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4YN, Tel: 01235 465500, Fax: 01235 465556, email: [direct.orders@marston.co.uk](mailto:direct.orders@marston.co.uk)

### *Fifty voices are better than one; Combating social exclusion and gender stereotyping in Gellideg, in the South Wales Valleys*

Gellideg Foundation Group and Oxfam GB, March 2003. Available from Oxfam UK Poverty Programme or can be downloaded from [www.oxfamgb.org/ukpp/resources/index.htm](http://www.oxfamgb.org/ukpp/resources/index.htm)

### *Participatory Learning and Action: A Trainer's Guide*

Jules Pretty, Irene Guijt, John Thompson and Ian Scoones 1995. IIED, ISBN: 1 899 825 00 2.

### *PLA Notes*

in particular Issue 38 'Participation in the North'. IIED, June 2000  
ISBN: 1357-938X.

### *Reaching the parts; Community mapping: working together to tackle social exclusion and food poverty'*

SUSTAIN 2000. ISBN: 1 903060 125.

# Appendix 1: Participatory Appraisal tools and techniques

PA consists of many tools and techniques, and the list expands continuously as the tools are added to and adapted by different users. These include:

## Mapping

Maps allow people to represent their environment – to explore what resources in their area are important to them, which are missing, what isn't valued and why. Mapping can be done with individuals and groups, of any age and ability. Basically, people draw sketch maps – either using pen and paper, or using objects to create a three-dimensional map. With a large group of people, maps can be drawn on the floor or the wall, and contain as much information as people want them to. Some mapping techniques, such as mobility maps, don't explore geography, but are used to represent where people go most frequently and for what purpose.

## Timelines

How do people's lives change through the day, week, month and year; what has changed in people's lives over many years, or their lifetime – and how would they see it changing in the future? What influences and causes those changes? A range of different tools can be used to answer these questions – 24-hour clocks explore how much time people spend on particular tasks/activities; weekly diaries can explore daily challenges. Calendars can help explore how things change over a year – when are the easy times and when are the difficult ones? Timelines that cover a person's lifetime can explore longer-term issues and are also invaluable when planning action.

## Spider diagram and impact analysis

There are many tools that help analyse cause and effect, the impact of actions and the relationships between people, institutions and actions. Popular tools in this group are the spider diagram and impact analysis. Through these tools an issue is explored in depth; the participants are continuously asked to dig deep – why does something happen like this? As each question is answered it is captured, but then 'why?' is asked again. In this way, the issue is 'taken apart', and this can be captured as branches, or intersecting circles. Getting to 'root causes' can also translate visually into diagrams of roots.

## **Prioritisation and action planning**

Exploring a range of issues in the community is in many ways the easy part; moving towards a collective agreement on priorities and action can prove difficult, especially when there are different interests.

There is a range of tools that help to tease out key issues, define problems, prioritise in terms of importance and dimension; and move analysis into action planning.

There is also a range of ranking tools that enable a systematic comparison between different options; these allow criteria by which people make judgements or choices to be explored.

Once some basic choices have been made, it is still important to think through how plans can be implemented. A range of matrices can be used for this; they enable the ideas to be explored through different filters – will the project have low, medium or high impact? Will this be in the short-, medium- or long-term? Will it be easy or difficult to do? Is it something that can be done by a group themselves or do they need other people to do it with them?

## **Evaluation**

Many of the tools described above can be used to monitor and evaluate projects and processes – time-lapsed maps for example are a useful way to assess a physical project. There is also a range of specific tools designed for evaluation. For assessment, they use criteria developed in a participatory way. These can be established at the beginning of the project (the aims and objectives are a useful start), or they can be developed as part of the evaluation process. The simplest tools ask people to score the criteria in some way – either visually on a picture (evaluation wheel, evaluation spider web), or numerically with beans or numbers.

## Appendix 2: Evaluation methods

This report emerged from two evaluations of the Walsall PA Network; *Evaluation of the Walsall Participatory Appraisal Network*, Philip Scott Jones, Elizabeth Awate and Griffin Zgambo, December 2002 and *Implementing Local Strategic Partnerships: can Participatory Appraisal Networks Help? Participatory Appraisal and the Walsall Borough Strategic Plan*, March 2003 by Elizabeth Awate, Griffin Zgambo and Philip Scott Jones, both from the Centre for International Development and Training at the University of Wolverhampton.

The evaluations used a variety of methods with trainees, trainers, managers and workers in agencies where staff had been trained, PA Network coordinators, and funding agencies. These included questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, focus groups, observation, informal discussions and document review. Because each method has its advantages and disadvantages, using several evaluation tools helped to ensure validity and reliability.

Eighty-four questionnaires were distributed, of which 39 were returned. Questionnaires were used because it was not easy to hold face-to-face interviews with a large number of people. They were also useful in helping to frame questions for follow up semi-structured interviews. Sixteen semi-structured interviews (SSI) were undertaken. These were relatively informal and provided opportunities for dialogue about complex issues.

Two focus group discussions provided opportunities for group interaction and clarification of key issues. Two non-participant observations were undertaken during training events. The observation was unstructured, with events being recorded as they occurred. A disadvantage of observation is that the observer's presence may affect the participants' or trainers' behaviour. However, we were able to systematically watch, listen and record training activities, capturing what people actually did during training.

Documents produced by the Network, members of the WBSP, and other stake-holders were reviewed. These included clients' application letters, consultation, workshop, training reports and memos, and strategy and planning documents.

The evaluation findings and a draft report were presented at a workshop. Participants then divided into groups to discuss findings and recommendations that emerged. Each group presented their ideas in a plenary session. One further focus group and eight interviews were conducted after the evaluation was produced and disseminated.