

Handling Conflict in Walker, Newcastle:

A review of the longer-term impacts upon workshop participants

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Executive summary

In October 2011, this research was commissioned to identify the long term impacts of NCRN-

funded Handling Conflict workshops on former participants.

Of those interviewed, 75% were current residents in the East End of Newcastle upon Tyne, with 20% living in the West End, and 5% living outside the city.

Positive long term patterns

Generally, the research found a strong positive long-term impact of the workshops, and no significant difference between respondents of different locations, sexes and occupations;

100% responded positively to how they felt about having taken part in the workshops

70% use more peaceful ways of resolving conflict always or almost always

75% made reference to a change in the way that they think or act

65% always, or almost always, feel that they have more choice about how they resolve conflict

55% responded that they always/almost always understand their feelings and actions better

Legacy

The key long-term legacy identified by the research highlighted the importance of a simple 'turning point' for workshop participants, and the impact that this has on thoughts and actions in their every day:

'It's really just how I think' [P]

'In the way I think about stuff, yeah...I see it totally differently' [O]

'I take more time out again, to listen' [N]

'I don't kick off as much' [D]

'I don't shout at my boys so much...[it is] a lot calmer'[E]

'I'd jump to my own opinion, now I think about what's going on' [H]

Overall, the research highlights the positive long-term impact of AVP workshops, and the important changes that this has brought to members of a community in the East End of Newcastle.

Introduction

The brief for this research was:

'during October 2011, to undertake approximately 20 interviews with participants in a series of Handling Conflict workshops held in Newcastle from 2009 to 2011, and to produce a report summarising the findings (statistical and qualitative).'

The key aim of this research was to:

Identify any longer term impacts of the Handling Conflict workshops on the participants.

This evaluation comes after a programme of NCRN-funded AVP workshops from June 2009 to July 2011, that were focused in the East End of Newcastle upon Tyne – particularly the Monkchester Ward within Walker, although residents from other Wards were welcome; Byker, Heaton. One workshop was held with residents from the West End.

Methodology

It should be noted that the researcher participated in an AVP workshop at the start of the research, so as to ensure an understanding between the experiences of participants and the knowledge and experience of the researcher.

Interviews:

Twenty participants were surveyed over nineteen interviews, where one interview was with two individuals, at their request. Twelve interviews were conducted in person, using a Dictaphone and hand written notes to record it. Seven were conducted via telephone, where extensive handwritten notes were taken. Interviews lasted between 20 and 45 minutes.

The interviews were carried out over a period of four weeks, using an interview schedule (Appendix A) that was arranged by the NCRN. Minor changes to the interview schedule were made after an initial pilot interview with a member of the community in Walker. A database of the details of former workshop participants, (which was stored under the strict guidelines of ethical research principles), was used to arrange interviews. The response to calls for interview was largely positive.

An effort was made to ensure a good spread of different participants within the survey; men as well as women (who constituted the vast majority of participants), participants who achieved Level 1 and those who also achieved Level 2, people who work in the community, and a sample from both the East End and West End. It was on the basis of this spread that interviews were sought, so as to gather an un-biased data. Table 1 details the spread of interviewees.

| 'Spread' criteria | % of interviewees |
|----------------------------------|-------------------|
| Geographical spread | |
| East End | 75% |
| West End | 20% |
| Other | 5% |
| Spread of minority groups | |
| Men | 20% |
| Non-white | 30% |
| Spread of workshop participation | |
| 1 workshop | 45% |

| | |
|--|-----|
| 2 or more workshops | 55% |
| Spread of those actively involved in the community | |
| Working within the local Walker community | 45% |
| Working within communities in the West End | 20% |

Table 1: Spread of interviewees

Analysis:

A preliminary analysis was conducted by first collating responses in order to gain an overview. This overview was then used to pick out the key patterns, which were subjected to further analysis. Both a general overview of responses and the key patterns are used for comment in the next section. Where a significant difference in responses exists with regards to any of the criteria for 'spread'; gender, location, race, residents/workers, this will be identified in the comment. Though, it should be noted that in general, no such difference was identified.

Findings

As outlined, this report presents the findings of the research. The analyses will be presented by question number, and are divided between three subheadings; 'positive impact', 'legacy' and 'futures'. A brief summary of the responses to each question will be given and where relevant, further comments will be made.

'Long term':

Before the analyses are presented, what is meant by 'long term' in the context of this report will be explained. The shortest time between workshops and interview was 3 ½ months (10 interviewees), the longest was 19 months. Therefore, the analyses here document reflections on workshops that happened after a significant amount of time passed, an important context within which to read the following analyses.

Positive impact

Question 1: Can you remember what led to you deciding to take part in the/your first workshop?

In each case this question was interpreted as 'How did you hear about the workshops?', with 50% of respondents identifying either 'through work' or 'friends'. The remaining 50% identified community groups and other social groups. The significance of this draws on Jeff Corrighan's 2010 report on the importance of 'networks' (Corrighan, 2010). This point will be expanded upon in the responses to question 11.

When re-directed towards the actual question, 55% of responses noted their interest in AVP as being useful for their professional or community work, where the remaining responses spoke of the value of a weekend away (10%) and expressing general intrigue (45%);

'[I was] looking forward to knowing what it was about' [F]

Question 2: Can you remember what your feelings were before the workshop happened?

An interesting gender dimension appeared in the responses to this question. The most common response to this question (65%) expressed anxiety, and a worry about 'not knowing what to expect';

'I didn't know what I was expecting, or why I was going' [C]

'Terrified...[of] not knowing anyone, not knowing what to expect' [D]

The second most common response (20%) expressed an excitement and enthusiasm – these responses were the 20% of men interviewed, as noted in Table 1;

'[I felt] excited, it was quite exciting' [N]

This data presents an interesting point for discussion, which will be expanded upon in the comment on data from question 9a) regarding men and AVP workshops.

Question 3: 'How do you feel now about having taken part?'

The general response to this question mirrors the feedback taken immediately after the workshops (Newcastle Local Meeting, 2011, p.6)– with 100% of respondents giving a positive answer to Question 3;

'You do try to resolve things...stops you flying off the handle. I loved them' [D]

'I think it's brilliant, I think it's really really good...it's good to hear other people's stories' [P]

'[I feel] Better. I've thought about some of the skills, some of the teachings' [N]

'I think I've benefitted from it – I've enjoyed it. Makes you think more about your actions' [B]

Of these, 10% responded that the workshops, whilst positive, had just affirmed what they had learnt in the past, as the respondents had a previous background in conflict resolution work.

This gives a good, if general, indication of the long term effect these workshops have had,

given that the workshops were thought of positively at least 3 ½ months after the course.

Question 4: 'What are the main things you remember about the workshop?'

Part of the reason as to why these workshops were remembered so positively can be found in the answers to this question, where 55% of interviewees spoke of how 'fun' the workshops had been, how much they had laughed, how much they had enjoyed meeting new people, getting out of town, and how much they had enjoyed their surroundings;

'eeh, it was a laugh' [H]

'everything...the games we played, the people we met' [P]

All responses to this question included a comment on the content of the workshop – remembering particular activities, praising the facilitation, and recounting lessons learned;

'it just shows you that you need to take the time and think' [H]

'the Volcano...now I'm starting from the bottom, before I started in the middle' [C]

'listening to everyone makes you realise that...it's not just me' [D]

'listening to people...and being heard' [Q]

'at the end, I've got my ending piece on my fridge. It's really good to have' [O]

Question 5: 'Did anything surprising or unexpected happen during or as a result of the workshop?'

Responses to this question were largely mixed, with no significant surprises, or unexpected outcomes – other than the surprise outcome noted by three interviewees of five community participants asking for training in facilitation skills to be able to offer aspects of the Handling Conflict workshops to local young people. Of the two most common responses, 20% of responses included comments on the friendships that were made, 20% speaking of personal changes;

'learnt how to talk to people, and control anger in conflict, instead of getting' heated' [J]

Other personal surprises included the amount which others were able to open up, the dynamism of the group, and the fun that they'd had.

Question 6: 'What, if anything, did you learn about yourself or about conflict during the workshop?'

As with question 5, responses to this question varied widely. 95% of responses were positive, with the final 5% opting not to answer. The responses largely focussed on the main lessons learnt, relevant both to conflict and self;

'I noticed a shift in my attitude towards violence' [M]

'[I learnt] to take a step back, [to] not be so angry' [C]

'[I learnt] that you don't always have to go in head first' [J]

'There's so many different forms of conflict' [N]

'the main thing that I learnt – I handle conflict better than I thought I did' [H]

'I used to go straight in...and since the workshop, I try to get to the bottom of it – rather than misread and act violently' [B]

'I thought I was the only one that gets myself into situations. [It's a] big deal to find out that there is conflict in everything – and the littlest things can cause conflict' [O]

Question 7: 'How often now, compared to before the workshop...';

- a) Do you have a greater belief in yourself?
- b) Do you have a greater understanding of your feelings and actions?
- c) Do you feel you now have more choices about how you resolve conflicts?
- d) Do you use more peaceful ways of resolving conflicts?
- e) Do you find you communicate more clearly when you are involved in a conflict?
- f) Do you feel you have greater respect for yourself?
- g) Do you find you trust people more and work with them better?

Figure 1: Responses to Question 7 a) – g)

As can be identified in figure 1, responses to the sub-questions (a-g) were largely positive – with 'Always' or 'Almost Always' making up between 45% and 70% of the answers given, identified by the blue and red blocks;

- a) *'Always, I felt as though I wasn't coping at all, and (now) my life's coming together' [B]*
- b) *'Almost always – I do know what I'm feelin, I'm a lot better now. Like, trying to breathe in, or bite my lip, things like that. And listen. I've learned to listen a lot' [O]*
- c) *'Almost always – now, instead of saying something, I sit and work it out in my head' [B]*
- d) *'Almost always – I'm more happy to walk away now' [E]*
- e) *'Always – I just stop and think about what it's about before I jump' [P]*
- f) *'Always – [because of] that understanding of knowing you can control yourself more' [J]*
- g) *'Not at all – I already had a high level of trust of people' [M]*

'Sometimes' accounted for between 20% and 5% of the answers given - and were often given in context of forgetfulness, or that, for example, trust of other people, respect for self, and choice depended on the situation;

'How often, compared to before the workshop, do you have a greater understanding of your feelings and actions?'

'Sometimes, 'cos sometimes I forget' [F]

Similarly, where 'A little' or 'Not at all' accounted for up to 15% of responses on any given question, participants were sure to identify that this was as a result of their previous

experiences of professional workshops or courses looking at conflict resolution; 'it reinforced what I already knew'. Or due to their own 'stuff' that they are working on (particularly with regards to question 'F' on self respect).

Legacy

A key legacy of the NCRN-funded AVP workshops in Walker is the workshops that are now being offered for young people that has evolved out of the enthusiasm of a few participants. This enthusiasm was nourished by NCRN, with one participant commenting that the thing they most valued from the workshops was; 'having the support to start [young people's conflict resolution]...Rosemary's trainin...her bein on the end o' the phone' [R].

75% of participants also spoke of changes in the way that they think, and changes in the way that they act – in AVP terms, 'turning points'. This is an extraordinary achievement given the long term context of these reflections;

Question 8: 'Have you noticed any other changes in your life since the workshop?'

'It's really just how I think' [P]
'In the way I think about stuff, yeah...I see it totally differently' [O]
'I take more time out again, to listen' [N]
'I don't kick off as much' [D]
'I don't shout at my boys so much...[it is] a lot calmer'[E]
'I'd jump to my own opinion, now I think about what's going on' [H]

It would seem that these turning points are not only offering the interviewees a choice 2 or 3 weeks after the workshop, but at least 3 ½ months afterwards, if not 19 months. These quotes suggest that the access given by NCRN to these teachings represents a key legacy of the Network within this community.

Question 8a): 'What, if anything, was the thing you valued most about the workshop?'

Beyond the 'turning points', 60% of participants made reference to the people they'd met, the group dynamic, and the *sharing*, as thing that they most valued about the workshop;

'the opportunity to meet different people from different backgrounds' [N]
'sharing stories, opening up' [J]
'I liked how the workshop was structured...I liked how we could discuss things' [I]
'meeting other people and the social interaction' [M]
'some of the people there weren't my kind of people, but, I enjoyed their company' [H]
'I'm not used to going out and talking to people...but we just sat, talked, and I felt like I could trust everyone' [B]

The remaining 30% commented on the value of their own self change, and reflections since the workshop, where 10% spoke of the consequent work with children;

'learning to think about meself a bit more...[that] what I think is important instead of just going along with everybody like I usually do' [D]
'I've come out a bit more in meself...I can talk a lot better' [P]

The responses to this question lend themselves to the key legacies identified above, that simply by creating a space, and earmarking time, NCRN has left a memory in this community that is rich simply with social interaction, learning and positive change.

Futures

Question 9: 'Were there any difficulties for you about taking part in the workshop?'

The majority of responses to this question (50%) answered 'No'. Of the remaining 50%, participants identified a number of individual difficulties; writing things down, role play, self reflection and physical activity, but none of which appeared to be a broader burden affecting many participants.

The issue of childcare was raised here (5%), but more attention will be paid to this in question 11.

Question 9a): 'What do you think would encourage more men to take part?'

Comments on a macho mentality, or that *'men don't do feelings'* [M] were given in 45% of the responses to this question. Interestingly, there wasn't a difference between the responses from men and women for this question. There seemed to be an understanding across both sexes that 'men don't do feelings' and are therefore *different* from women emotionally, (as suggested in responses to question 2) or that men on AVP courses are 'different' from 'other' men, which leaves much to be discussed beyond the boundaries of this report;

'the men in my family'll take the mickey outta me...they think it's stupid, this sort of course' [B]

Given the gendered understanding of 45% of the respondents, the main suggestion appeared to be to market specifically to men's groups (25% respondents), and holding men only workshops (20% respondents) would encourage more men to attend;

'men who work in care would be more likely to do it' [D]
'who is promoting it and how, would make a big difference... get popular young men involved to encourage others' [N]
'when I told my brother and my mates, they thought it sounded really interesting...if you specifically target men, you'll get men' [O]
'can't you do a workshop just for men?' [J]

Amongst these ideas was the suggestion that a residential workshop would put off men, whereas it attracted women who were reflecting on how much they had enjoyed 'getting away for the weekend'.

Also, it is interesting to note, that none of the responses to this question include men from Walker, a key absence in the discussion on what will encourage more men to take part in AVP workshops in that area.

Question 10: 'The workshops were aimed at people living or working in a relatively small area of Walker/East End. What do you think were the benefits/disadvantages, if any, of this focus?' N.B – only asked to Walker/East End residents, so analyses below based on 75% of responses to the overall report.

Here, there were two key issues that were brought up; recognising people, and pulling the community together. Of these two issues, each was thought of as both benefits and disadvantages depending on the perspective of the individual;

On recognising people as a benefit; (20%)

'I think it made it easier, 'cos people that I didn't know, I recognised' [P]

And as a disadvantage; (20%)

'I knew a lot of them, a lot of them are my friends...some things, you hold back a bit, where, if it's a stranger, it's easier' [C]

On community benefits; (40%)

'[it is] beneficial, to pull people closer together' [Q]

And as a disadvantage; (20%)

'[with] people from different places...maybe it'd work better' [D]

The mixed response to this question suggests a need for further enquiry, although it is perhaps the case that until a possible change of workshop was suggested, it wasn't something that had been a cause for concern to the participants, until asked in interview.

Question 11: What will encourage more people to take part?

Participants came up with a number of interesting suggestions. Some of the suggestions included;

'hearing about others' experiences [with an event in the local community]' [D]

'with it being a weekend, lots of people can't manage it' [H]

'I think the residential was really good, but childcare was a really big issue' [F]

'emphasise the benefits [of the workshops] to other people' [M]

'More advertising, it's not very common, not many communities know about it' [J]

An issue that came up that raised a difference between East and West, was that *'It's harder for Muslim women to get away [for the weekend]' [O]*, and that a locally based workshop might work better in those communities. Indeed, respondents from both the East End and the West End highlighted the need in their communities to provide more workshops; 'when is the next workshop, can I go?'

Also, a key theme in the answers to this question, was the problem of childcare. People spoke of it as a barrier that would ensure women could not attend, and others recalled the experience of childcare at two of the weekends, and how distracting that had been for the mothers.

Referring back to the networks mentioned in question 1, it is clear that, although advertising and clarity of marketing were raised as things to be improved, there was a clear emphasis on *who* was doing the advertising, and *who* was doing the marketing; i.e. members of those communities. This builds on a comment heard a 3 times throughout the research, of participants who were planning to attend a level 2 but who pulled out because a friend could no longer go. On that note, 75% enthusiastically said that they would help spread the word within their local communities, by sharing their experiences, at work, and within schools.

Conclusions

Overall, this report has documented the highly positive long-term impact of the AVP workshops on participants, and pointed out two key legacies of the project. Participants reflected on both the skills and tools they had learnt, and were using, and also the fun that they had experienced. This provides another testimony to the success of the AVP workshops, and also a strong case for the continuation of the work of NCRN within Walker, and within other districts of Newcastle.

References

Corrighan, J. (2010). 'Understanding the Social Fabric and Social Dynamics of a Particular Neighbourhood'. Available online; www.newcastlecrn.org.uk. [last accessed 3/11/11].

Newcastle Local Meeting. (2011). 'Quaker News'. S.1.

Appendix A

NCRN Autumn 2011 evaluation – Handling Conflict workshops

Interview questions to Handling Conflict participants

NB principles for researching Handling Conflict workshop participants: interviewees must take part voluntarily; and their responses must be kept anonymous (ie no identifying information collected by the researchers).

Some interviewees will have done more than workshop and questions should be adapted accordingly.

Purpose: to identify any longer-term impacts on the participants.

1. Can you remember what led to you deciding to take part in the / your first workshop?
 2. Can you remember what your feelings were before the workshop happened?
 3. And how do you feel now about having taken part in the workshop?
 4. What were the main things you remember about the workshop?
 5. Did anything surprising or unexpected happen during or as a result of the workshop?
 6. What if anything did you learn about yourself or about conflict during the workshop?
 7. How often now (compared to before the workshop): *
 - h) Do you have a greater belief in yourself?
 - i) Do you have a greater understanding of your feelings and actions?
 - j) Do you feel you now have more choices about how you resolve conflicts?
 - k) Do you use more peaceful ways of resolving conflicts?
 - l) Do you find you communicate more clearly when you are involved in a conflict?
 - m) Do you feel you have greater respect for yourself?
 - n) Do you find you trust people more and work with them better?
- *Always
 - Almost always
 - Sometimes
 - A little
 - Not at all
8. Have you noticed other changes in your life since the workshop?
Prompt if necessary: these might be changes in your family, or in your community, or in you – how you think about conflict, how you feel about yourself, or your health, or anything else?
 - 8 a) What if anything was the thing you valued most about the workshop?
 9. Were there any difficulties for you about taking part in the workshop? These may have been about the content of the workshop, or about practical arrangements you had to make in order to take part.
 - 9 a) What do you think would encourage more men to take part?
 10. *For Walker/East End residents only:* The workshops were aimed at people living or working in a relatively small area of Walker/East End. What do you think were the benefits/disadvantages, if any, of this focus?
 11. What, if anything, do you think would encourage more people to take part in the workshops? Would you be willing to help spread the word? If so how? [*we would need names for this bit*]