

# THE COMMUNITY GROUP



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**Regenerating Professionals  
Sustainable Communities Summit 2005  
Fringe Event**

Carolyn Kagan, Sue Caton and Marilyn Barnett  
Manchester Metropolitan University



Manchester  
Metropolitan  
University

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Regenerating Professionals?  
Sustainable Communities Summit 2005 Fringe Event

Carolyn Kagan, Sue Caton and Marilyn Barnett  
Research Institute for Health and Social Change  
Manchester Metropolitan University



RIHSC: Research Institute for Health & Social Change

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RIHSC: Research Institute for Health and Social Change  
Manchester Metropolitan University  
Elizabeth Gaskell Campus  
Hathersage Road  
Manchester  
M13 0JA

Tel: 0161 247 2563 / 2556 / 2774

Fax: 0161 247 6842 / 6364

Email: [c.kagan@mmu.ac.uk](mailto:c.kagan@mmu.ac.uk) or [s.lewis@mmu.ac.uk](mailto:s.lewis@mmu.ac.uk)

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This report was edited from transcripts by Sue Caton, Carolyn Kagan  
and Marilyn Barnett

CD copies of the event or further copies of this report are available on request from:  
David Brown  
Administrator  
Research Institute for Health and Social Change  
Manchester Metropolitan University  
Elizabeth Gaskell Campus  
Hathersage Road  
Manchester

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## Introduction

As one of the fringe events of the 2005 Sustainable Communities Summit held by the UK Government in Manchester in February 2005, Manchester Metropolitan University undertook a roundtable event entitled *Regenerating Professionals?* This consisted of a panel discussion and questions from and further discussion with the audience. The panel (as below) were invited to join the roundtable because they had different perspectives on, and different positions in both regeneration and professional work around regeneration.

The aims of the event, which was attended by approximately 30 people, were to:

- Explore the difficulties professionals face when changing their practices through regeneration work.
- Identify constructive ways professionals have engaged with their communities
- Consider innovative ways to evaluate regeneration initiatives
- Discuss ways stakeholders can create strong levers for change.
- Assess principles, skills, and working practices required of professionals involved in regeneration.

The idea behind the event arose because of the work that has grown between the University, local communities and professionals around different kinds of regeneration agendas. This includes economic regeneration, social regeneration, and environmental regeneration. One of the findings that arises, from both our work and of research findings in the social and economic fields, is that one of the last things to change in any regeneration and social development programme, is professional practice.

By professional practice we refer, in part, to those professionals who have become the new regeneration professionals. We also mean all the contributory professionals: the teachers, the psychologists, the social workers, the housing managers, the environmental managers and so on.

What is it that makes it so difficult for that professional practice to change? Where practice has changed, what is it that enabled or helped these changes?

## The Panel

The panel consisted of people with different perspectives on regeneration and experience of the roles of professionals.

Chair: Professor Carolyn Kagan - Director of the Institute for Health and Social Change, Manchester Metropolitan University. I am a Community Social Psychologist with experience of working with residents and agencies involved in community development and regeneration.

Dr Juliet Goldbart - Department of Psychology & Speech Pathology, MMU. Member of the Research Institute for Health and Social Change at MMU. I have two reasons

to be involved. My teaching job is in educating health professionals, particularly speech and language therapy students. My research interest is working with families with a member with a disability, to evaluate the services that they receive and the kind of services that they experience.

Phil Barton - Director of RENEW, Regeneration Excellence in England's North West. RENEW is the recently established regional centre for regeneration excellence. We aim to take forward the sustainable communities agenda as developed by the Government which is about trying to make much better and stronger links between different professions, different organisations and different aspects of regeneration. RENEW is supported by the Northwest Development Agency and by the Government office. We are trying to bridge economic development and the built environment, professions and practice, with public service delivery, neighbourhood renewal, and neighbourhood management practice. My background is that I came to Manchester to work twenty-five years ago and I've been involved in a whole variety of different projects in all three sectors, mostly around environmental regeneration with communities and businesses.

Chris McLaughlin - Manchester City Council - Head of Surestart. Prior to having a city-wide role for 4 years I managed the delivery of Surestart. Surestart is a scheme that creates new services for families from minus 9 months (ante-natal care) and children up to the age of 5. I was also responsible for the East Manchester family and young children programmes, broader than just Surestart. My professional background is in social work and nursing.

Tony Durrant - Director, Positive Action Northwest. I suppose the reason for me being involved is that my career in Manchester started as leader of the Moss Side and Hulme inner city councils and I was very much involved in the regeneration of Hulme.

Sue Castile - I am the Chair of the Daisy Bank Tenants & Residents Association in Newton Heath, Manchester, and encounter professionals in many different ways.

## **Audience**

Those members of the audience who spoke are referred to in the report by first names when known, or by pseudonyms.

Known first names: Angela, Sophie, Michelle, Ian, Becky

Pseudonyms: Dave, Adam, Seb, Julie, Jenny, Neil, Anna and Zara



## **What are the challenges or difficulties that professionals face when thinking about changing good practices through regeneration work?**

### **Chris McLaughlan**

It's a tall order, this question really, because first of all it assumes that all professionals do experience difficulties. I think by and large there is a difficulty with clumping of people together. It's almost as if all professionals think and behave in the same way. With a group of health visitors, a group of teachers, a group of housing officers, there are individual professionals who first of all accept that services could improve... They're not absolutely wedded to 'what we do is the best thing since sliced bread', so there's a genuine commitment with an individual to say 'yes I'm sure we could probably do things better'. The whole attitude lends itself, if you like, to changing practice and at the same time accepting that there is room for improvement in the service that they offer. They aren't too defensive. They go in to a particular job believing right from day one, 'this isn't a tablet of stone, now throughout my whole career I'm going to think and carefully consider how I continuously improve'. It's about the individual, rather than, say, all health visitors who will find it difficult. There is something about individual attitude and behaviour that will either make it more difficult or less difficult to improve and change practice.

I think a problem that we have with whole ranges of professionals (and again Surestart has tried to challenge this a great deal over the past four, five years and earlier, along with other initiatives) is that people feel very proud of their roles and have worked hard to gaining qualifications to become a certain professionals. By and large a lot of the training to become a professional, whether GP, nurse, social worker, or teacher, often has very little if any emphasis at all on 'you could be wrong'. You gain professional confidence by 'this is what I know' and 'this is what I'm good at', which is absolutely fine to a certain extent. But I think what this has done is created a barrier between professionals and families and communities particularly in deprived areas, because there's almost been an attitude of 'we know what's right for you'. The professionalism has created a barrier around being done to, rather than being listened to, and I think that we do not change practice at all through regeneration work if we don't have front line, and middle senior managers, who are very good listeners.

People can talk a lot you know and love to hear the sound of their own voice and no more so than in particular professional language and jargon. (I know I'm being pretty negative but this is the way I see it.) There is a lot about the language - jargon - that makes us feel very proud and confident which is absolutely fine. What that does, is give you the attitude of the professional 'I know more' and 'I know best'. To me that's one of the biggest difficulties we face. It's about giving people, not professionals, the voice – this is not to challenge their confidence as an individual worker, but saying 'actually you are a better deliverer of services if you first and fundamentally can listen to people'.

I can give you an example from Surestart. One of the early public service agreement (PSA) targets was to reduce the levels of postnatal depression. In particular, to be effective at identifying postnatal depression, and giving women and their families, very responsive services. Now in a way, one of the most important lessons I think we learnt, certainly in East Manchester, was that if you're going to give a really good service to women experiencing postnatal depression, you start with asking those women first 'how have our services met your needs? Have they met your needs? Were we there when you needed us?' In other words work together as partners to find out what we could have done with hindsight that would have given a better service.

Now interestingly, a group of women who were engaged in East Manchester particularly from the Clayton area, came to the conclusion that the biggest message they wanted to tell midwives, health visitors and family support workers, was that OK, they were diagnosed with postnatal depression using the health visitor Edinburgh Assessments Scale, but many of them said "I was absolutely low and feeling rock bottom long before the baby was born". Some didn't have to wait till their baby was 6 – 8 weeks old to say 'oh we've been really depressed'. So it was listening to those women and having to, if you like, work with groups of professionals to say 'stop talking and listen to what we as local residents are telling you about the service you have or haven't offered'.

So that's a long-winded way of saying difficulties professionals face when changing practice are to have the ability to listen, in a non-tokenistic way. Professionals often do think that they are listening. If you take parents evening – (and I don't know how many people here have their own children, or have ever been to parents evening). I will use my own example as a service user to go to parents evening. I have never once been asked by the teacher "tell us about the service that we give to your child and your family". I mean I don't know if anyone agrees with that. I have never ever been asked "can you give us some feedback as a class school teacher?" you know what I mean? I have never once been asked that.

### **Tony Durrant**

I don't discredit what Chris has said. If I start from the standpoint that every professional comes with their own set of rules and expectations, and if we accept that, then I think we can begin to deal with the issue. What I want to do is to divide it up into three levels. The first is the Government professional, the funder professional. The second is the technical, the parachutist, those professional experts that come into work in regeneration programmes. Lastly I want to touch on the community worker, the professional activist. We all know these people exist, and for me they are all professionals.

I will start with the Government and the funder. These people expect certain things from the project they are funding or the people they are dealing with. I think as you work with them all the time and they begin to understand and accept that there are different ways of approaching the same problem or challenge, I think that they are willing to change, and most people will change in terms of how they see organisations or how they see projects developing and performing. From my own

experience as an ex-civil servant when I came to work in the inner city, I came with the idea that we had to follow the rule book, we had to do things that our master said we had to do. We had to ensure that the right outputs were delivered, that they followed a specific rule and that they had to deliver on those things to time and to budget. But we know the world is not like that. We know that as you work with these people, and in particular as you work with a lot of disadvantaged groups, they are unable to meet some of those demands. Therefore you, as the Government professional, have to quickly rethink how you are going to work with some of these organisations and some of these individuals. For me this is quite an eye-opener because you suddenly realise that the rule-book doesn't cover everything and you have to make up your mind, if not immediately, but soon thereafter, that in order to get the job done the professional official would have to change - and they do change.

On the second level we talk about the technical, the consultant, the parachutist who comes in to organisations, again with their own set of rules. They are paid, again, to deliver against certain objectives. These people are quite focused, maybe from their training on what is best for an area or for an individual. But again they have to change, because we know that not every solution fixes every problem. I think most professionals and most technical professionals will accept that what they designed in the beginning is not what their client requires. It's like the computer consultants. You have this thing that you start out with - the computer consultant designed a specific programme. By the end of the two years and the contract is ended, the project resembles nothing of how it was originally designed. I think most technocrats and most professional consultants will accept that they have to change according to the rules of the community and the individual.

The last level that I want to touch on is the community worker - the professional activist. We know that in regeneration it's from the community worker and the communities that a lot of these projects are first of all debated and put up for funding, and it's because of their need, drive and ambition that a lot of these things get funded. Now, professional activists will tell you that they have the answer to everything and no matter what the other professionals do they will always believe that they are right. But again over time I have found that professional activists, because they require certain things from those funders and from those other professionals, they begin to change how they operate, in how they do things.

I think when those three different levels come together I think you do see a willingness and an understanding of the issues that allows the three types of professionals to change in how they address the issues and how they deliver against those solutions.

### **Juliet Goldbart**

I think that Tony has got a very interesting picture of experienced professionals but I would like to take issue with something that Chris said because I think very often the professionals that take up posts in urban regeneration areas are our least experienced professionals. Very often we expect people fresh out of university or college in their first jobs to take up perhaps some of the most challenging roles. I

would suggest that it's actually not over-confidence that restricts these professionals in changing, it's a lack of confidence. When you're new into your profession, you're new in terms of being employed, you're new as a worker. What you do is hold on to what you know, and I think it's much more difficult to acknowledge that there may be people out there in the community that actually know more than you; who maybe, through parenting several children, through caring for elderly relatives, through living in a particular area, they're the people with the skills and knowledge. But all you've got is your training and your qualification and your certificate, and it's much more difficult at that stage in your career to almost suppress that and say 'ok well, yes, I will listen. May be, may be what I learnt in my text books and my course isn't actually the most relevant or the only answer to this.'

The point that I think you are absolutely right about, Chris, is this idea of dialogue, and that unless you can educate professionals to start out with a listening agenda, so that they go into the workplace prepared and ready to listen, then we set people up to fail at very early stages. And we know that burn out is very, very common in young professionals.

## **Discussion from audience**

### **Adam**

I was interested in a point that Chris made about maybe not always having the right answers and maybe not all accepting what one does as being best practice and also the point Mr Durrant made about change. It strikes me that if regeneration is working, the context is constantly changing, the context within which the professional is working and as a consequence professional practice, the ambiguity will be present. I would like to ask Mr Durrant, is there any difficulty in terms of managing ambiguity in that situation? Because the context is changing and the consequent response the professional provides is changing, and that implies a certain amount of ambiguity.

### **Tony Durrant**

Absolutely, so you will have the difficulty of managing that ambiguity because, and this is what I was trying to get over. If you recognise those changes and you recognise the benefits of those changes, I think it's easy to accept and easy to sell those benefits back to the people who funded, or who are ultimately responsible for that regeneration programme.

### **Adam**

You did comment that when you start out what you want to be may not be what you end up, because things unravel in that world of ambiguity. And what the funders select as a target, at the end of the day, may not necessarily be where this journey leads you. So there's a point that strikes me as very interesting about managing that ambiguity. The funder can't necessarily have defined the targets that are met.

## **Tony Durrant**

But the point I was trying to say also, is that from the start funders will define outputs. They say for example you must deliver 100 jobs by the end of year 2, and we know that not many people achieve that because there's the mere matter of double counting from time to time. And different funders accept - and even, yes even major funders, accept - that there are some grey areas in all of these outputs which were originally set to be a certain amount.

## **Chris McLaughlin**

I think as well, in relation to the point around regeneration, that by and large regeneration scenes are like the circus that arrives in town. They've got either a short, medium, some reasonably long term. Quite often, more often than not, they've got a date by which they arrive and go. The regeneration teams like the New Deal team, the SR (Single Regeneration Budget) team, you know what I mean, the regeneration professionals, - they come and go. It's the professionals who stay around that I'm particularly interested in. I know all about retention difficulties, but set all that aside for a moment. By and large in most areas, there are core groups of staff, such as core groups of health visitors and social workers, teachers, housing officers. I think it's almost irrelevant whether it's through over-confidence or lack of confidence, but whatever way it comes across to groups of families about whether services respond to their needs, or not, it shouldn't be from a starting point of defensiveness. That's the thing for me. It is about learning to improve our services, not from a defensive starting point, and by and large I see many professionals are quite defensive, I don't apologise - this is what I see. I think it is listening to communities like Newton Heath and Clayton, Beswick, Openshaw, Moss Side - all the wards of the City of Manchester where we are trying to listen, that we understand 'yes this is how we sometimes come across to them'. Once we understand, we've got to improve our services by taking a different approach, and it's that that regeneration should allow us to do.

## **Seb**

In my experiences with Surestart, the teams that come in have been taught how to interact with other professionals but they don't seem able to work as equals with community activists. I have found a very condescending attitude towards community activists at the bottom of this sort of structure. I think that one of the problems is that a lot of these projects are very short term. Activists are there, Professionals come in. They've got the rules of the game and are only just beginning to understand them themselves so they can't explain them to the community activists involved, and there is a whole lot of uncertainty there. I think when you add structural constraints like the Data Protection Act, the whole complicated billing processes for budgets and financial accounting and things like that, it can really alienate the people who know what the needs of the community are, I think that's a problem that's not going to go away.

## **Jenny**

I don't disagree with most of what Chris said, but I do disagree with the 'circus in town'. I know of a lot of committed people who are in Manchester City Council that have been on secondment rounds. They are moved, because they've got the

expertise, to the latest SRB area through no fault of their own, and are not going up the ladder. They are being paid the same amount of money to take the crate load of expertise. (Don't forget the regeneration game is a fairly new one, it only started in the early 90s. Before that we had the Urban Programmes.) There are people who have stuck around and have done East Manchester, North Manchester, Wythenshawe, A6 corridor and they have been learning and growing as they work through that process and are not necessarily well rewarded. The biggest service in the town, the Commonwealth Games, and the people that ran that, didn't integrate as well in the communities.

### **Julie**

I want to go back to the nature of professionals themselves and the fact that we describe professionals as people that are party to a body of knowledge that is particular to their profession, and they stick with their rule book. And then to think about what you're all saying about the need for those professionals to change, and to really listen and understand. They have to be incredibly flexible. It brings up a question in my mind about the training of professionals. If we are imparting a body of knowledge to them in the training and we are saying 'this is the rule book and get out there and administer it', there's a big chunk of that training we're missing. And we could even be attracting into professions the wrong sort of people because they think it's about a body of knowledge and applying a set of rules. In fact you have all been describing something which is about flexibility and entrepreneurial enterprise in the approach to the job, in which we review, stand back and not hold on to things. I think there's a missing dimension in the training of the professional, and understanding of a professional, which is actually quite exciting and quite challenging and quite individually rewarding. If you are a true professional you have to step outside the rule book: you have to apply your knowledge in a new and innovative way. But when we think about professionals, we don't think of them like that. We think of them as stereotypically bound if you like, and people that are attracted to Professions may be those sorts of people. I am just thinking about when we set up the courses for professionals, when we draw people into those professions, are we telling the full picture or are we blocking off something that is actually creating all those barriers that you are talking about over a desk, not being able to communicate, sticking to rules, holding on to things? We may need to attract totally different people into the process.

### **Juliet Goldbart**

I think that's a very good point. My job is educating professionals. I think that we are looking at knowledge, skills and attitudes. I will also say that in the last three to five years we've made very big changes in the way that we educate students. We were told for a long time that, for example, Surestart was not a good place to send our students on placement because they would be doing preventative work, not intervention, not therapy. But our line has always been that's what they are going to be expected to do when they qualify, so that's what they should be doing while they're training. So we've made some changes in the way that they're educated and we look far more explicitly at expecting them to examine themselves, and if they're expecting other people to change they need to be able to change themselves. That notion of being an active learner and a continuous learner and being open to change is now really at the heart of our education. But it's hard and we lose quite a lot of

people on the way. Our attrition rate is quite high and I think part of that is that people come and it's not what they expect and it's difficult for them to adjust.

## Ian

I'm an architect and my experiences have also been teaching in the architectural and interior design profession, where students, when they qualified, have a massive impact on the built and living environment we see around us. My training and experience is that typically people are trained to believe that they are all mini Michelangelo's or Leonardo's. But of course we're not and the one thing that you realise when you qualify is that you have to work with a grouping of other professionals to actually deliver the product. And of course that begs the question 'who is the client?' Who is the client most effected by these things that they design? When I was teaching, someone once said, that if someone painted a bad picture, you can put it in your attic, but if someone designs a bad building or a bad environment you have to typically live with it for about thirty years - as witnessed by places like Hulme - before the funding allows for them to be demolished. Of course during that time the people they have a massive impact on, are the poor souls who live and inhabit those kinds of environments. It seems to me that the thing that characterises professionals is that we collectively need to get our egos into position so that we actually realise and recognise who the people are who we impact most on, and who really are (in a sense irrespective of where the funding is coming from or who are political masters), the real clients? We were having a conversation last night about something Margaret Thatcher once said 'that there's no such thing as society'. But of course we all live in society, and that's all of us including professional people, who practice their skills in that society. I think it's a question of us collectively working together to making a better future. I think part of the training is the thing that has just been touched on so strongly. It's the fact that it's important that when professionals are being trained it's about being informed that the people they effect most are the general public, who they will be coming into contact with on a daily basis.

## **What are some constructive ways in which professionals have engaged with their communities? (This does beg the issue of identifying these communities)**

### **Phil Barton**

I've been listening to this discussion with great interest. The first thing I would like to say is that regeneration is actually a politically contested activity. There are all sorts of players in the regeneration game who have different views, different perspectives, and different stakes in the community. To take Ian's point, the people who are going to live in a regenerated housing estate, are one set of stakeholders, the people who are going to fund it are another, the people who are going to manage the streets are another, the people who are going to run Surestart in that area another, and so on. So it's actually a contested activity, and I think the professions in general are not sufficiently aware of both the status and role and position that they have in the process, and the need for an active and honest engagement around the contested nature of the regeneration process.

The first way in which most professionals engage successfully in their communities is through the one they live in. I think we need to remember that all professionals are human beings, citizens, and most of them have families. So I think the starting point for me, for professionals, is their role as a citizen, and as an active citizen, in the community in which they live, but also in the community in which they associate – that is their professional community.

I think one of the complexities and challenges of regeneration and working communities today is that 'community' concept. Communities are very diverse they are not just geographic communities, they are communities of interest, and increasingly many of those communities of interest are very dispersed physically.

At RENEW I've come in to this hugely challenging role to try and work with a very broad range of professions. There's an interesting report published by ODPM last year 'Skills for Sustainable Communities' - The John Egan Task Force. This identified over a hundred professions which the Task Force said were core professions to regeneration. They went on to state that there are many other associated professions, and the distinction they made between the two, was that core professions are those where people would recognise that what they were doing was regeneration and they were spending much, or even most of their time doing it. They include community leaders, elected members, and business leaders who are involved in regeneration. The associated professions they identified are people like police officers, head teachers, public health workers, people who wouldn't necessarily see themselves as being engaged in regeneration at all, but the way in which they interact with others is absolutely critical to the regeneration process.

I think that this whole issue comes back to attitude of mind. The same report identifies a whole range of what they call generic skills and behaviours that they expect all professionals engaged in regeneration to exhibit. Many of those skills and behaviours are ones which you would not find on the professional courses that are



being taught (certainly when we are talking about the physical environment professions, the planners, the architects, the landscape architects, and so on which are closest to my own personal experience). You would be more likely to find them in a management school or business school than you would in many of these courses.

So I think there are some real issues about how the engagement with communities takes place, where the skills people need are being given. The knowledge they are being given does not underpin the skills which actually would encourage them to carry out that constructive engagement. And yet we've all come across individuals who have that attitude of mind who believe it's important and are determined to make it work. You can see them still in most regeneration partnerships and in most regeneration areas, the individuals to whom the community will relate and whose attitude is to try and get something done and to try and move things forward. This is in contrast to the individuals who see their professional skills crudely, as something that they can use to pull up the drawbridge and exclude, and it's a way of getting a better salary and to shut other people out (I'm exaggerating to make a point). Really, where there is successful engagement in community is where the professionals see their skill as something that is there to enable activity by others, and to both identify and encourage their abilities. It may be the skill of vision and leadership. I don't think we should underestimate the fact that many communities can get very stuck with where they are, and sometimes they actually need help with seeing that other things are possible. But the effective professionals do it from an attitude or position where their skills and professional expertise are there in order to enable and to support, and not to impose and to insist.

I'd like to take slight issue with the point that regeneration is new. I think if you go back to the inner urban areas like Peter Shaw's Act in '78, we were talking about many of the same things – mainstreaming, connecting together environmental economic and social regeneration. I think what has changed is a recognition that single issue initiatives are much less likely to succeed. So out go sport action zones, education action zones, health action zones etc, and in come really serious attempts to do the whole job together. But that means that as professionals we need this enabling attitude. We need to build trust and we need to see our skills, our knowledge, as being a resource for the regeneration of an area and not as something to control it or impose on it. I think that is the challenge of teaching professionals, of bringing them on; but even more, it's important we teach the new ones. In the North West we've got many thousands of people who are already there, many of whom are and will be very open to things that I'm saying, many of whom will not. I think there is a huge challenge relating to continuing professional development and helping to ensure that we do get the sort of reflective practice and the ability to change and learn that we need. The individual, the institutions and the power relationships involved can all make it very difficult.

## **Sue Castile**

Examples from our Tenants Association of constructive ways that professionals engage with community activists, have been that they send us leaflets telling us what they're going to do before they do it. This is effective. The environmental manager for instance has been very successful. We make him listen. He does listen, he does

take on board what we say and he has done quite a lot for us. He took on board everything, whether business or social things, this is quite something from a professional, to go into a council house isn't it? They've got all these prejudices. They go from one job to another job, all within the same sort of area, and they bring in prejudices with them so it is very hard for us to engage with them and show them what really works for us.

The environmental manager gets to know us and sees us as people now, not just as moaners and groaners and nuisances – he shares our vision for a cleaner brighter area, which it has become about 80% for us now. 12 months ago it was disgusting. So our environmental manager, we found him really easy to engage with, and you know he obviously finds us easy to engage with because he spends a lot of time in our area, anything we ask him to do he does it.

Through engaging with the environmental manager we've got to know the manager for cleansing. If you can get hold of the name of the manager for cleansing, well done. I actually got him in my house - quite a coup. We told him about the problems we had! Where we live it's quite a busy area, because we have a park, we've got two pubs, two off-licenses, a supermarket, a nursing home, a youth club. So we get a lot of strangers, you know strangers passing, and stranger rubbish, new people to the park. We go out on a Saturday morning, or Sunday morning picking up everyone's rubbish that they've left the night before including bottles, so the kids can play out in the park the next day. So through getting to know the environmental manager, we got to know the manager of the cleansing. He came out, we took him a walk round and we showed him the problems, and now we've got them cleansed three times a week.

So they are listening to our needs and taking it on board and that's a good result for us. We've got to now work on the housing officers. When we get there we'll talk about that!

### **Carolyn Kagan**

How about the non-core regeneration professionals that Phil mentioned? That is, all the other professionals that are around, say for example, the police. You've got quite a lot of dealings with the police, how do those dealings contrast with the dealings with the environmental manager?

### **Sue Castile**

We've got no relationship with the police. We have tried but we still get that 'we know best and you don't know anything' answer so that's really difficult. I will give an example of the bin raids we've had.

For a few months we've had somebody coming round our area raiding bins. Basically they open the bins to see what they can find to sell on or keep. But while they're doing that they throw all the rubbish on the floor. Then we've had another one come in just standing back with his torch, like he's searching for ID. This was reported to the Housing Officer of the district, the environmental manager, the police, the crime and disorder team. A month's gone, and for some reason I always seem to cop them... I wake up about four o'clock, five o'clock, and whenever I woke up on

a Tuesday morning which is when they come to empty the bins, there's this bin raider. So I phone the police, and say "oh there's someone mooching the bins", and no-one comes. Anyway to cut a long story short this has gone on, and on, and on. We were at a meeting a few weeks ago and we mentioned this bin raider. So the next meeting, there was a leaflet out for us to cascade to the tenants. So they were giving us the job to tell everybody about this bin raider which we refused to do, that's their job. Then the last meeting I went to last week was the local action partnership meeting which the police, crime and disorder team, all the professionals attend, and the bin raider was brought up again. So it was like, "this bin raider, I've reported it to you, you, you, you and you". And they all sat looking at me. So the police officer said "well I did send an officer round to check this bin raider", so I said "when?", and he said "on er bla, bla night", so I said "well bin raider works in the early hours of the morning. Why did you send him out at night, and not in the early hours of the morning.....on a Tuesday, on a Tuesday?" So they decided when to send somebody out to investigate without asking us what the details are, the location, an identity, what are they wearing. So, really, we found it really difficult with the police, really difficult. We've got quite a high burglary rate where we live and although we're trying to give information that could be relevant to this burglary hot spot we've got, nobody has really taken that information any further than on the phone and that's it. So that's really frustrating.

### **Chris Mclaughlan**

I support all the comments Phil's already made. The starting point for me is about who the stakeholders are and whoever may decide together 'what is it we're trying to achieve together?' and then say so. Thus if we know, in terms of quality of life, this is the goal we're working towards, let's make sure everybody first of all realises they're a stakeholder. East Manchester is my most recent experience of a day to day management responsibility for working together to try and create a better quality of life. In terms of stakeholders, some of the early work was about bringing to people's attention the acknowledgement that they were a stakeholder and might not realise it, GP practice or local Library. I believe if you work in any position within a community, and are very, very clear about 'this is my job description and I do tasks a, b, and c or whatever', and actually haven't had the opportunity before to think about a part of the role being to contribute to regeneration hand in hand with a community and neighbourhood, well then it's an opportunity for that to be. I think some of the early work was about an answer to this question around stakeholders, 'who are the key stakeholders or leaders for change?' I mean that's shocking jargon really, I'm sorry but it is. To me regeneration should bring the opportunity to say 'right who are the main people within this neighbourhood; people who live here; people who work here; who can get together and think about, what are the five key goals that we want to achieve by 2008, 2010?' Once you're clear on getting a collective agreement on what are we trying to achieve, then we should be able to say, 'are all the stakeholders involved engaged?' 'Do they know what it's like?' This is a process really, it's not rocket science is it? I'd be interested in people's views on this.

## **Discussion from Audience**

### **Angela**

I've had a classic example today to help people to understand what it's like for women like Sue and me working on Council Estates, dealing with professionals. This example today is just perfect. My elderly neighbour is 82 and very active. He takes care of himself, he's out every day - great. He had a stroke a few months ago. Luckily he's recovered, you know actually made a full recovery. But just after it he'd lost a bit of confidence, and he was worried, and he put in for a move, because we live in first floor flats the two of us. So the council did everything, like came to visit him, filled in his form, made him priority. Now in the meantime he's recovered and he's starting to feel better. I offered to ring up and cancel it, so I rang the housing office to say he doesn't need the transfer now, he's decided he's alright here and he'll stay here. So she said "but the medical officer said he needs a first floor flat", I said "well yeah because we didn't know how he was going to be, now he's made a miracle recovery he's fine". She said "no but they've said he needs a first floor flat", so I just kept saying "well yeah may be because he's 82 if they're going to move him they would put him on the first floor, but now he doesn't need it" and this conversation, went round and round. She couldn't think beyond what the medical officer had said. So I just had to say "look, he's staying" and put the phone down, because otherwise there was no way of getting through. This is our housing officer. I can't believe sometimes that these people make decisions that affect my life. I find it terrifying. And that's an example today. I didn't know how to proceed with her because she just kept repeating that the medical officer had said he should be on the ground floor. So well yeah when he was panicking a few weeks ago.....now he's in the bookies on Thursdays!!

### **Sophie**

I was going to ask had you any ideas about consultation fatigue? I was working in Partington before I started in East Manchester and I think they've had so many years of failed regeneration initiatives and so little funding going into the area now. I was trying to consult and it was so difficult because people were just totally turned off by it. We tried to listen, but in a way people just got tired of people not listening and it going nowhere. We were trying to think of different methods and techniques to engage people and try and make it different, and to schools and all that kind of stuff, but it's really hard. Are there any new methods?

### **Phil Barton**

Who can blame them? I remember many, many years ago when I worked for the City council in the 80s going to consultation meetings which were about the environment. People said they didn't like the dog shit and they didn't like the graffiti. The people on the panel didn't want to talk about dog shit, but you know finally the penny seems to have dropped, that so-called 'liveability' is important. The local area issues are important and do matter, but residents have been telling us that for decades.

My experience, and this is probably drawn as much as anything from Groundwork, is that what you mustn't do is over claim. There must be no hidden agendas. 'We can't do this, we can't do that, we can't do the other. We can help you to try and raise that with somebody else, this is what we might, what we can do'. So you define your sphere of influence and my experience is that on the whole, people are by and large understanding, provided you're honest with them, and this doesn't just apply to the community it also applies to other professionals as well. And then it's important to deliver something. If they say 'we want X', deliver them a bit of X and then the trust begins to build and then you get X plus and then you get XY and then you get XYZ. I think so many consultation and regeneration schemes have promised too much too quickly. They've not been able to deliver them and you get into the opposite spiral, distrust, disbelief, nothing is going to happen. So, small, small, with a clear agenda. The same would apply if you're in a local authority, that is clarifying what it is that you have control over to offer and being very, very clear about that. I think what matters is trust at the end of the day, both ways.

### **Zara**

I support what Sue said. I don't know how we can define regeneration professionals anyway, because so many people are involved. In relation to some of the other comments that have been made, the premise we start from is that we all live in a community and understand that. I don't think we do, particularly, in terms of the regeneration professionals, because quite often we don't actually live in the community we're working in, and so we don't understand. Going back to the very first question we started with, we don't actually understand how to exactly engage and understand the needs of that community, because it's actually quite alien to a lot of regeneration professionals today. It reminds me of a community school in Newcastle, where criticism was made of the headmaster who drove in from a nice suburban area everyday and drove out everyday. The understanding of that community school, and its needs, and the community that use it was just not there. So I don't think that we have cracked that one yet, in terms how we do it. I also think Sue's actually given a lot of honesty in terms of engagement within what she said. It is about investment, which this government isn't willing to make in regeneration: it does take a lot of investment to build the trust within the community. What happens quite often is consultation, and we need to ask, 'why are we going in doing that?' When it is unproductive it's when we are not committed, we don't know the purpose of it and we are building up false hopes all of the time. Every community has a different approach, a different diversity, different people who want to be listened to and hope to be involved in a very different way. All that requires a great deal of time and investment and resources to understand and work with the people, in order to adopt a more user led approach.

One example is of a project that I've been involved with in the community, which is around Asian women, parent carers of disabled children. Over five years we changed it from being run by people who had no experience of caring for a disabled child at all, to today where it's run by carers of disabled children themselves and delivered by volunteers who are users themselves. Now it's running much better than it did before because it's being led by people who actually understand the needs of the people involved.

I do think that they are geared to the kind of ambitions we had in terms of the way regeneration is delivered today, but we don't actually understand the communities we are trying to regenerate as professionals. There are more fundamental issues around that need our support before we begin to see how we want to involve communities and ask 'how do we value their involvement?' At the moment everybody's fatigued because we want lots of people to come and sit on our committees and tell us what they want, and talk to us and fill in questionnaires which at the end of the day are building lots of hopes and not delivering. So people get fed up with that.

### **Phil Barton**

I think the point I was making about the community is, if you don't understand your own community as a professional you're not going to get very far anywhere else. I fully accept that there are major issues about how we as individuals work with the diversity of communities that we find ourselves having to deal with.

### **Michelle**

As a community activist, I'm currently involved in various consultations at various levels in North Manchester. Certain meetings are fine, plus everybody seems to be working together towards the same goal. But on a sort of lower level, where you have just got people coming from tenants' associations, we're finding it difficult to engage with the people even in consultations in a constructive way. It seems that if a tenant puts something forward that the housing hadn't thought about, it may get acted upon but it doesn't actually appear in the minutes. I've put an idea forward myself, it didn't appear in the minutes so I forgot about it. I went to another meeting and the council officer happened to put forward the same idea, which made me feel very resentful. He was taking a note of everything that we were saying, but they weren't putting it in the minutes, and we weren't getting any of the credit for it. It's important for the officers working with us to have us on their side because we've got local knowledge. We can suggest ways of trying to engage the community in general, because speaking to a bunch of tenant reps is completely different to talking to individual tenants on our estates. I'm getting to the point like I'm banging my head against a brick wall sometimes. I feel like I'm being patronised because they've got all the technical knowledge, and we've only been told about the basic principles behind it. I just find it very frustrating for us activists. It's very off-putting, to continue going to these meetings. We are trying to be constructive but it's difficult to build up any trust with the officers because they are just basically pinching our ideas but not giving us any credit.

### **Carolyn Kagan**

That's a useful point, and it's one that's linked to the issue about consultation fatigue. Often local people talk about these situations as 'banging your head against a brick wall' and after a point you stop doing it and you don't want to consult any more.

### **Michelle**

There's also the issue of times of consultations. You can get them to do it during the evening. But, if they (the officials) do, they get time off in lieu, whereas when we're attending these meetings we're giving up our free time. In my case, I'm giving up a

lot of time during the day, and I have to take it out of my holiday entitlement or I have to work up those hours either beforehand or afterwards. I still feel like we're not being treated with the courtesy and respect that we're entitled to.

### **Dave**

In that particular case, it's a question of power. This is why community organisations and community groups need to get together to organise. If you do that, you can, as a group, say "well I'm sorry", when you go to the next meeting, "I don't accept what you are saying because this is something that was said at a previous meeting would you please amend the minutes" etc. Organising as a group is so important when it comes back to the issue about consultation fatigue. I think we have to accept that communities must come together and try and deliver against some of their own objectives so that they can show that they can organise, and can work. Sometimes that's the only way those people with the power will listen.

### **Michelle**

The trouble is that the only time we get together is when these things are organised.

### **Dave**

But you don't have to wait for these things to be organised, that's what I'm saying.

### **Michelle**

Yeah but all our consultations.....you've got people from Harpurhey and then a group from Newton Heath. It's not very easy travelling between the two areas so it's not that easy for us to say 'organise ourselves'.

### **Sue Castile**

As a tenants' rep you have to wear many hats, so if we're engaging with one professional they've got one hat on, but we've got five or six on, because we have to deal with different professionals in different areas and try and get something done. So Michelle is saying that we can speak to the chair of this consultation, and she can go back to all her resources at the town hall. Whereas we've got to get home because we've this to do, or work to do, you don't have time to stop and you know chit chat after. We usually do it by e-mail. Which is one way that I can have my power with professionals. Any query I've got I e-mail it and demand a receipt, so I know they've got that message and they've got to respond. It really is consultation fatigue, we've been talking about.

### **Becky**

I think if you're going to get consultation engagement you've got to have level playing fields and need to involve the voluntary sector. It's about peer led research and user involvement, and actually getting rid of the jargon and language that professionals talk in, and talk in ordinary terms. But I agree with what has been said. I mean I've been a City council tenant for 8 years and I've always said "well I'll go to a tenants meeting". But as a professional, you're given time and money to go and attend these meetings and do things outside the meetings: as a tenant or a service user we've got to find time ourselves. It's about trying to find inventive ways to encourage

people to participate but levelling our playing fields so when they do, they do feel that they're being respected and can put across what they want.

### **Neil**

I wanted to come back to what Phil said about the politicisation of the whole regeneration issue and the way it's a contested issue. I disagree that officers are not necessarily aware of the fact that it's a contested issue. I think sometimes they are captured by the whole political process and become sort of agents for it. One of the hurdles you get with consultations is that officers already go in with an agenda. So what they're doing is they are saying "well here are some leaflets" or "here's your choices" they are not asking at the beginning in what direction people want to go. It's not giving them a choice about the boundaries before it all happens. I think that causes people to lose interest, particularly in an area where the community are not seeing eye to eye with the political views of the authority. I think when you allow professionals to set agendas like that, you get real problems with people just disengaging. I think you see that again, in things like the Tenant Board where you get a Tenant rep on a housing board, they are then acting in the interest of the association rather than the community. They are not allowed to do otherwise, so the community is again kept out of the process. I think we need to go right back to saying to the community 'what are your views?', and allowing them to be driving the process rather than choosing between options.

### **Zara**

There are some good things that happen in terms of engagement and there are some quite good examples of stuff and samples of questions around as well as some of the research work that I'm involved with. We try within our research around regeneration to work with the communities that we are looking at. Often that means that we are not actually going in consulting and researching but we are actually managing the process, so that we are working with people. In that working with people, there's lots of scope to actually engage lots more people within your work and even employ people and pay them to be engaged in that process. Then they can evaluate their involvement and hold meetings or focus groups or interviews at times that are convenient to the people that you are working with. You will be working evenings, weekends and all sorts or at market stalls or street corners or whatever. But the people that you are engaging will value that. You pay for that in time, and we value that within our research and project work. Sometimes we have been fortunate and undertake research projects on a longer term. We've been able to engage quite a lot of people in the community, and capacity build our trade and build the tools that we are using so that we are all working on the same basis. Then you are leaving some skills and lessons behind. We know that where we've done that, that those members of those communities have been able to use those skills in other work or we've been able to offer them other work, within our research in other areas. I think there are, on the positive side, some very good techniques around of engagement. Now if that can be transferred to a wider public sector, who are much more reluctant to invest, and value and pay and work in a different way, then I think things might start getting a little bit better, as communities might feel that there is a commitment on both sides.



**Anna**

This question is particularly for Sue. You say you have to wear many hats. Do you find there are problems caused by professionals who use the same words as each other but the words mean entirely different things?

**Sue Castile**

I understand that many professionals have certain things they have to do and say. Every meeting that's arranged, it's always the same. Any input that you've got it never gets minuted, never. We've insisted that it's minuted but it's still not minuted. Anything that's said it's always what the professionals had to say that gets minuted.

So we just go really to show that we've got our foot in the door. Because it's only recently that tenants' reps have been invited to sit on local area partnership meetings. At least you can hear what's going on even though they're not listening to you.

## **Conclusion**

Each person was asked to make a concluding comment

### **Phil Barton**

I've been thinking during this later part of the discussion about the position professionals find themselves in. They are mostly, in one way or the other, agents of the State or they are there to make some profit out of it, so they are agents of capitalism. I think there are some interesting dilemmas which we touched on from the community end about being a professional, and about some of the issues that we've talked about in terms of the generic skills, and the need to be able to operate effectively as a broker and to build trust, given the structures in which we find ourselves.

### **Juliet Goldbart**

I think the thing that has come through most strongly to me is the need for professionals to listen. I thought Sue summed up absolutely brilliantly the three things that she and many other community activists do to try and make it easier for professionals. She talked about how they have a clear and common vision, she talked about establishing relationships with people, she talked about targeting key people knowing the system. If you're doing all of that, the least that professionals can do is listen.

### **Tony Durrant**

Professionals must decide that if they work in the area they should maybe live in the area. At the same time I'd like to see community members staying in the area. After they have upscaled, and made the regenerated area that much better, they often leave: quite often those people who started out as activists leave and move out of the area. I think that's where organisations and in general regeneration tend to lose the capacity and sustainability.

### **Sue Castile**

I'd just like to say to the professionals, "you don't know what's best!"

### **Chris McLaughlin**

I suppose in a way what we've not had the opportunity to talk about is finding ways and making more opportunities for residents and young people who live in neighbourhoods and communities, that people have decided need regenerating, to take up some of the professional posts. I think there's something about that, about ambition, aspiration, opportunity, that we've not touched on at all, and I think there's loads of mileage in that. We need to give people the opportunity to get involved and then have a pathway. And why not become one of these professionals? Then, rather than professionals arriving from outside, the experts are already there. The jobs should be available locally, no matter what the professional background.

## Carolyn Kagan

We have covered a range of positive and not so positive aspects of working with and as professionals in regeneration. We hope there are a number of things that have been raised we can all take back to our work and lives and try and take the positive and constructive ways of working with professionals that we've been hearing about.

Key issues addressed have included:

- the central role of non-defensive attitudes and values in professional work in regeneration;
- ways in which different community views can be sought and drive the regeneration process;
- the importance of listening and being clear about professional limitations;
- clarity about the extent of involvement of different regeneration professionals involved in regeneration;
- the key role of flexibility and rapid decision making;
- confidence and lack of confidence of professionals and a willingness to learn from experience and do things differently;
- the adequacy and inadequacy of professional training, and paradoxes that can arise from using professional expertise in regeneration;
- the importance of meaningful collaboration and of acknowledging the parts played by local people and local knowledge and expertise;
- the complexity of regeneration policies and practices that require technical, expert and local, deep knowledge and experience;
- the necessity that professionals are equipped with generic and specific skills, which include entrepreneurial and leadership skills, underpinned by positive, facilitative attitudes;
- shared visions contribute to good collaborative working and to gains for both communities and professionals;
- the importance of encouraging local people to become regeneration professionals and to provide paid opportunities within the regeneration process;
- the recognition that local people contribute to regeneration in their own time which can add pressure to their lives;
- the need to develop more participative ways of collecting the views of local people and finding ways of creating change;
- the diversity of 'community' and of 'professionals' and the dangers of assuming a 'one size fits all' approach;
- the dangers of consultation fatigue which can be alleviated by acting on collaborative decisions, and valuing and crediting local people's contributions;
- open, honest and clear communication avoids the suspicion that hidden agendas are operating and creates trust;
- the value of regeneration professionals understanding – possibly living in – the localities in which they work;
- the positive advantages of local people driving and leading change, not just contributing to it;
- the advantage of local people and groups organising in order to be more effective;

- the need to understand the multiple commitments and responsibilities of community activists and representatives;
- regeneration is a political and contested issue around which different people have different views and priorities.



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