

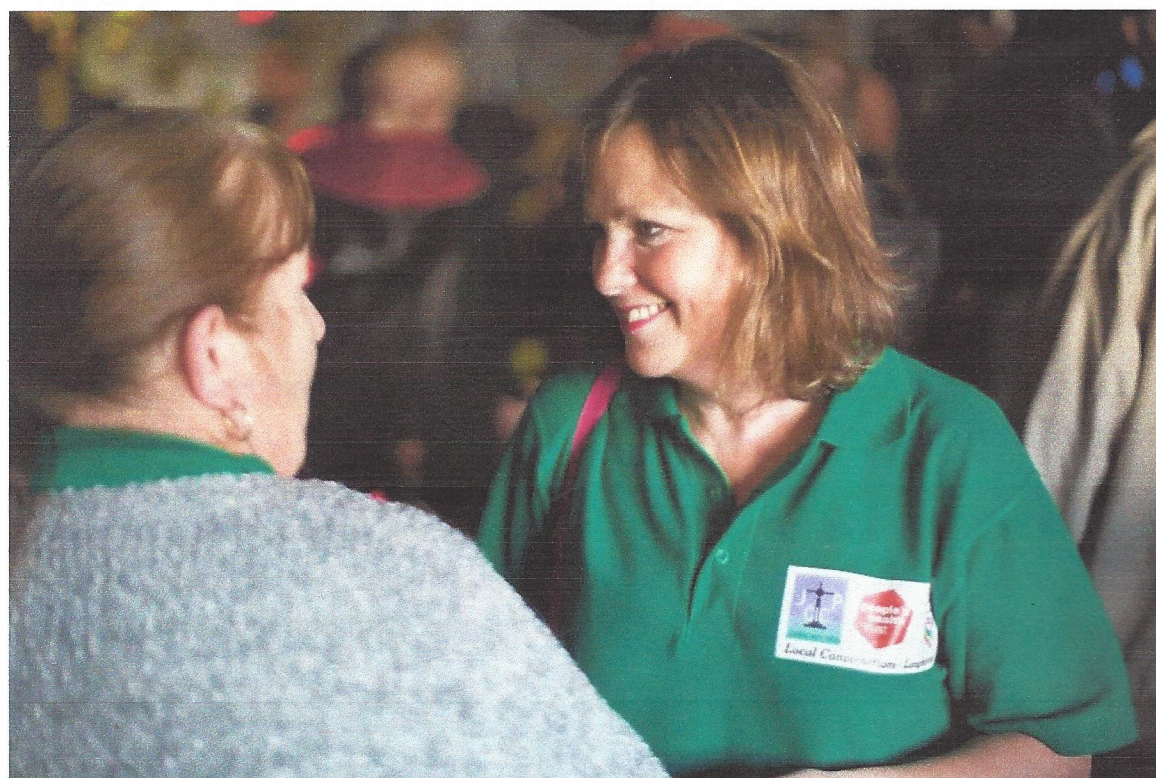


## Power with... people

05 April 2017

In this piece, Karen Clark from the Local Conversation in Longbenton, explains how they're supporting residents to realise their power.

"I think it's really difficult to talk about empowerment of local people and local communities without talking about the concept of power. Exploration of power is a brilliant way to support local people to increase awareness of their own individual and collective community power.



What's exciting about the Local Conversation programme is that it supports local communities to take greater control over what happens in their neighbourhood. Local people are at the heart of the project in Longbenton, Newcastle; they are actively involved in decision making roles at every level including project design, delivery, management, recruitment, meetings and negotiation with service providers, monitoring and evaluation.

The residents living in Longbenton have a wealth of skills and knowledge, and the ability to take power - and by coming together, through the project, we've been able to support them to realise that power.

There are many different types of expressions of power. The most commonly recognised form of Power - 'power over' - has many negative connotations for people; you think of repression, force, coercion, discrimination, corruption, abuse. Power is often seen as a win-lose kind of relationship. Having power involves taking it from someone else, then using it to dominate, and prevent others from gaining it.

When people are denied access to important resources like land, healthcare and jobs, power over can perpetuate inequality, injustice and poverty. In the absence of alternative models and relationships, people often repeat the power over pattern.

Practitioners and academics have searched for more collaborative ways of exercising and using power. Three alternatives offer positive ways of expressing power that creates the possibility of forming more equitable relationships - power with, power to and power within. By affirming people's capacity to act creatively they provide some basic principles for constructing empowering strategies.

Power with is about finding common ground among different interests, and building collective strength. It's based on mutual support, solidarity and collaboration. Power with multiplies individual talents and knowledge, can reduce social conflict, and promote equitable relations.

Power to refers to the unique potential of every person to shape their own world. When based on mutual support, it opens up the possibilities for joint action to make change.

Power within is about a person's sense of self-worth and self-knowledge. It includes an ability to recognise individual differences, while respecting others. Power within is the capacity to imagine and have hope; it affirms the common human search for dignity and fulfilment.





The Local Conversation has given the community a new structure for decision making. As the project's been developing, and people start to see tangible results, and feel things changing, we've seen both the individual and collective confidence of residents grow, and power dynamics change.

On an individual level, the project is helping people to feel more in control of their local area and in their own lives, and giving them increased confidence in their own power, and their ability to influence others, including politicians and other decision makers and service providers.

To support the empowerment process we facilitate interactive workshops with local people and explore the concept of power, we highlight the effect of power on feelings and emotions. One of the ways we demonstrate this, is to ask people to draw or write an example (they are comfortable to share) of a time when they felt powerful and when they felt powerless. This exercise highlights a wide range of emotions, and the insights gained facilitate deeper exploration increasing understanding of why people may choose to exert power over others.

Another really good exercise to deepen consciousness of an individual's own power is the 'egg' exercise. The egg – a real life uncooked egg - is used to symbolise power. Each discussion group is given one egg per group and only the person holding the egg is allowed to speak. The egg has to be passed very carefully between group members as each takes a turn in the group discussion. Holding the egg – holding the power - helps people become

conscious of their own power and ability to use it in positive ways. It's a big challenge not to break the egg!

Exploring power in this way has helped develop a really strong foundation for collaborative working in Longbenton. Local people have increased consciousness of their own individual and collective power and they are choosing to use power in ways that benefit everyone in their neighbourhood."

Karen Clark

Chief Officer – Justice Prince CIC

Funding for the Local Conversation in Longbenton has been awarded to Justice Prince CIC by People's Health Trust – using money raised by HealthRespect through The Health Lottery. The project involves supporting residents to develop a shared vision for their neighbourhood, putting residents at the heart of community initiatives so that they take control of the design, development and delivery of local change.

To read more about this project, [click here](#).

To see more pictures from this project, [click here](#).

To read about other projects funded by the Trust, [click here](#).

To read more about the Local Conversations programme, [click here](#).

To read about how the Trust evaluates its impact, [click here](#).