

50+ Citizen Engagement Project

Video Letters from Ely Citizens - Pilot Report

Introduction

“I want somebody to listen to me”

“I want somebody to listen to me” was the original title for this pilot. As the title suggests, the pilot was about bringing the concerns of older people to someone in authority. The idea was all about giving older people a voice.

Older people can make their views known to their Local Authority by using letters, phone-calls and e-mails. But that's not for everyone. There are barriers to older people communicating their views such as: lack of computer skills, lack of confidence or a sensory impairment. There might also be the thought of: what's the use of being a lone voice?

The engagement issue was giving older people the chance to express their views both as individuals and as a group. This issue was tackled by making 'video letters' and sending them to Local Authority officials.

This brief report covers:

- the route taken from the original idea of “... listen to me” to the pilot as it was actually undertaken;
- details of what happened in Ely, Cardiff;
- pilot evaluation.

Acknowledgements

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Mathew

Cardiff City Council

John

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Gloria and her wonderfully helpful staff.

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The Islwyn Camcorder Club

Especially Alvin, Jim & Gordon

Welsh Institute for Health & Social Care

Ceri

From Idea To Reality

At the beginning

One of the main aims of the 50+ Citizen Engagement Project is to generate better understanding of the barriers to active citizenship for older people. In a series of workshops, these barriers and other citizenship issues were discussed. As should also happen in a workshop, we produced ideas that could be developed into ways of achieving more and better citizen engagement.

One idea that came from the first project workshop was:

“I want somebody to listen to me” - Video Booth

The notes on this original idea can be found in Appendix 1.

Taking the idea forwards

All the ideas coming out of the project workshops were passed to the project's work group. The ideas were discussed for strengths & weaknesses, especially do-ability given the project's limited timeframe and resources.

At this stage, some excellent ideas were dropped just because they weren't do-able in the project (see). Selected feasible ideas were then considered in more detail and improvements made.

The second version of the pilot idea is shown in Appendix 2.

Turning the idea into reality

The revised idea shown in Appendix 2 was included in a set of pilot suggestions approved by the Project Board. This set of suggestions was circulated amongst the project stakeholders with a view to them running a pilot.

At a meeting in Cardiff, Age Concern – Cardiff & The Vale expressed an interest in the video pilot. A series of meetings, telephone calls and emails culminated with one of Age Concern's sponsored venues agreeing to collaborate in trialling the video letters pilot.

What Happened

Healthy, Wealthy & Wise is based in the old Trelai library in Ely, Cardiff. It's a great place for older people to meet, enjoy company, have lunch, listen to talks and presentations, learn new skills and more!

Gloria, who runs the Healthy, Wealthy & Wise Centre, outlined to the membership what was being proposed about doing the video letters. A dozen or so members volunteered to make videos about their concerns about daily life in Ely.

Recording the video letters

The letters were recorded on February 6th, 2008. A room was hired and kitted out for video recording. Lunch was provided for participants. Not everyone came to make a video letter. Even so, there was considerable interest and

discussion amongst many of the Centre's members about the use of video in getting people's voices heard.

When they were ready, people who wanted to make a video letter came into the room. There was a brief conversation about what would happen during the recording. The process was pretty straightforward – and worked rather better than getting your passport photos done! It was like having a video-booth instead of a photo-booth.

By the end of the day, twelve people had recorded their views on daily life in Ely.

Editing the video letters

In total, there was about 90 minutes of video recording – too long for practical use.

Members of the Islwyn Camcorder Club volunteered to produce DVDs of the 'edited highlights' of the original recordings. The DVDs were produced in two formats. First, there were 12 personalised DVDs – one for each of the video letter senders – containing an edited version of the individual's view of daily life in Ely. Second, all 12 individual letters were collected together and placed on a group DVD, titled 'The Voices of Ely'.

Video letters in use – type 1

On March 5th, 2008, a further session was organised at the Healthy, Wealthy & Wise Centre. The purpose was to:

- Show the edited group video;
- Gauge participants' reaction to having their views edited;
- Use the group video to stimulate discussion;
- Finalise pilot evaluation.

The video letters were shown two or three at a time followed by reactions from the fifty or so members present. Discussions were lively!

Members who stopped for lunch voted on the concerns. The top five priorities were:

1. Hospital bed shortage
2. Roads – holes & humps & drainage
3. Safety on the streets – community police at night
4. Litter
5. Youth Amenities

Video letters in use – type 2

Each person who made a video letter was given their own copy of 'The Voices of Ely' DVD. In addition, they were given a stamped & addressed padded envelope to a senior Local Authority official. The envelope contained a DVD copy of their individual views plus a covering letter.

The people who received the packages understood it was now 'over to them' whether they signed, addressed and posted them.

Evaluation

This was a small-scale pilot with very limited resources. The scope for evaluation was necessarily restricted. Despite these limitations, the pilot was evaluated along the lines set out in the TOOLKIT.

Did the pilot do what it was intended to do?

Yes.

This affirmative assessment is demonstrated by a comparison between the pilot intentions set out in the appendices and the above account of what happened.

The only shortcoming concerned linking the person in authority to the people making recording the video letters. To expand on this point:

Problems encountered

This pilot ran smoothly until the final stage. No formal agreement could be arranged to get a video response from someone in authority in the Local Authority. The individual video letters have been sent to the Local Authority. We await responses.

Who participated?

Table 1 shows the number of people who recorded videos and information on gender and age.

Table 1: People recording video letters			
Total (number)	Female (number)	Male (number)	Age over 70 (number)
12	9	3	10

What were the citizenship characteristics of the participants?

Table 2 shows information about the participants' characteristics as citizens. The characteristics are taken from the TOOLKIT.

Table 2: Citizen characteristics for Ely Pilot		
Citizen characteristic	Yes (Number)	No (Number)
Voted	12	-
Contacted elected member	6	6
Signed petition	6	6
Joined phone-in	2	10
Contacted newspaper	4	8
Used Internet	1	11
Gone on march / protest / demo	-	12
Attended government meeting	5	7
Member of campaigning group	1	11
Member of political party	2	10
Member of trade union	8	4
Member of faith community	12	-
Formal volunteer	6	6

No formal analysis of the information is presented.

The most significant observations from the table are:

- All participants vote and are members of a faith community.
- None of the participants have gone on a march.
- Very few participants have joined a phone-in or used the Internet or been a member of a political party.

No firm conclusions can be drawn. However, scanning the table generates the suggestion that using video letters was perhaps an unusual activity for our participants.

Tentatively, it could be considered that, as an innovation, the pilot was successful.

What were the participants' reactions to the pilot?

The following set of boxes show the reactions of some of the participants to the pilot.

What you found interesting or have learnt?

- Other peoples' points of view
- That there are people willing to complain, but the listener must be listened to
- Interested to know other people are keen to know your views
- That maybe something will be done about my grievances
- We all have different things to complain about – together we could put the world right!!
- Everything
- Listening to peoples' points of view
- What should be done in Ely

What have you enjoyed?

- Taking part
- Able to complain and suggest
- All of the programme
- Taking part and being interviewed
- We are not afraid to speak as we find
- Peoples' involvement
- Discussion of the DVD
- Seeing what people need

What do you wish had been part of this pilot?

- Some of the council members being present
- That more members had taken part as this is one chance to perhaps change things for the better

What have you found useful and will take away with you?

- Because I think everybody contributed which was good
- Too early yet to respond to any suggestions
- Being able to say what you feel with no trouble
- Assurance that at last pensioners are being heard
- All very useful if the outcome is satisfactory
- General questions
- Nothing
- That other people are interested in what they would like done in Ely

Would you get involved in a similar project to this?

All 8 participants who completed this part of the questionnaire responded 'Yes' to this question.

Informally, participants said that they approved of the editing of their video letters as this process improved their message.

What resources were used?

The pilot kept within its £1000 budget. The main costs were room hire, catering and consumables such as DVDs.

The pilot relied heavily on the goodwill and support of the many people acknowledged at the start of this report. A reminder that people and their relationships are always the vital resource.

Appendix 1

“I want somebody to listen to me” - Video Booth

Aim:

This is all about giving older people the chance to engage – and possibly start to become more deeply engaged - on their own terms. It's a bit like Vox Pop but more developed

Why:

- Any older person who can get to, say, a supermarket, gets the opportunity.
- The video booth gets round many of the barriers to citizen engagement

How:

- Set up a booth in, say, a supermarket - it's a bit like the photo booths for passport photos
- Older people are invited to go into the booth and are videoed talking about an issue or something that concerns them
- They just look into a fixed video camera and talk – just a head-shot, talking heads style

Evaluation/ outcomes:

- The issues could be general or very specific, e.g. leisure activities
- If specific, all the videos would be shown at the relevant Local Authority committee meeting and the reactions and responses of the members videoed
- Copies of the original videos and the responses would be delivered to the participants who would be invited to further discuss their opinions

Appendix 2

50+ Citizen Engagement

“I want somebody to listen to me”

Using video to develop & sustain engagement

The basic idea

This is all about giving older people the chance to engage – and possibly start to become more deeply engaged - on their own terms.

By using video in community settings, there's the opportunity for older people to express their views in a direct way to their Local Authority.

If you write a letter to your Local Authority, you expect a written response. If you post a video to your Local Authority, you expect a video response.

One of the innovations in this pilot is about guaranteeing a video response to older people's views from, say, the relevant Local Authority officer or appropriate committee.

Completing this initial communication cycle of 'my view – Local Authority response' is designed to create trust. As a follow-up, the person making the video will be contacted about the possibility of becoming more engaged, e.g. by joining a forum or participating in a focus group.

It's a bit like VoxPop but more developed.

Which Barriers-to-Engagement does the pilot address?

See overleaf for the complete picture.

This pilot has two particular strengths. First, it seeks to actively engage older people in their communities. This is part of the 'on your terms' message. Second, by using video, the pilot eliminates a major citizenship barrier for some people: literacy. This reinforces the 'on your terms' message.

The pilot's most glaring limitation is that some older people will not want to use the medium of video. How many people will decline the option to 'have somebody listen to them'? That's a question that the pilot will answer.

Dealing with the barriers to engagement

Barriers to engagement	“I want somebody to listen to me” - Video -
<i>Lack of personal resources</i>	
- Education & skills	✓ - no skill required to sit for video
- Money	✓ - no money needed
- Physical & mental health	✓ - this barrier needs to be addressed when recruiting participants
- Mobility & transportation	✓ - contacting social isolated older people also needs to be considered
- Disability and sensory impairments	✓ - as with the previous two factors
- Social contacts	✓ - don't need them
- Time	✓ - may need to 'book' people in advance
<i>Lack of motivation</i>	
- No knowledge of benefits of participation	✓
- Unaware of civic participation opportunities	✓
- The issues debated are of little interest	✓ - choice of issue clearly matters
<i>Previous negative experiences</i>	
- Unsatisfactory meetings	✓
- Consultation overload	✓ ? – could provoke cynicism
- Failures of council to listen	✓
- Perception of manipulation	✓ ?
- Unmet expectations	✓ - no guarantee that anything will happen
- Bureaucratic slowness / inertia	✓ - returning the 'video response' quickly
<i>Cultural Issues</i>	
- Minority groups	✓
- Usual suspects	✓ - goes well beyond usual suspects
- Language and literacy	✓
- Values and beliefs	✓
- Form and style of engagement	✓ ? – video isn't for all
- Community divisions	✓

Key;

- ✓ - barrier to engagement dealt with
- ✓ ? – barrier possibly dealt with
- X – barrier not dealt with

Where will the videos be recorded?

The pilot will trial & test a number of different sites.

There are a number of possibilities to consider:

- On the street
- In an OAP group
- In a pub
- In a supermarket (café)
- In older people's homes
- On a bus or train.
- At a leisure centre
- Many others?

Clearly, three vital considerations:

1. Is videoing 'do-able' in each of these locations.
2. Some of these locations lend themselves to particular interests, eg. A bus or a bus stop is good for discussing transport.
3. Privacy issues (this was the point of using the video booth).

How will participants be recruited?

This needs to be done in line with the above considerations of place.

There are two main approaches to recruitment.

First, there is direct invitation to an OAP group or an older person in sheltered accommodation or maybe responding to a letter in the local press.

Second, there is doing it 'roving reporter' style.

If older people themselves are mainly responsible for conducting the pilot, then this opens up some options. (But need to be aware that this might introduce a distinctive form of bias into the pilot.)

Resources

People

We need a team of probably 3 – but could get away with 2 – depends whether it's 'out-on-the-street'.

For out on the street:

- 1 person to 'recruit': explain to older people what it's about, do initial screening & so on
- 1 person to video
- 1 person to collect person data.

Time

Probably, we'd need to do around 15 to 20 videos to make it worthwhile (yes?). Allow 2 to 3 days for this.

Contacting the relevant officer or champion or cabinet member or whoever – need first to alert people to the pilot. “Some people might not want to play ball”. Need permissions.

Then arranging for ‘video interviews’ and making responses – allow 4 to 5 days

Second contact with participants – distributing videos (appropriate format) & working out how to take things forward – allow 2 to 3 days.

Data processing & write up – allow 5 days.

Total time – around 16 days

Money

Assume we’re going to use existing video equipment and technical skill.

Costs are mostly incidental expenses like DVDs, travel & postage.