



Latent Potential :

Tapping Human and Social Capital to promote and support Gender Equality in decision-making



Alison Reeves



PROFESSIONAL PROFILE

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| Current Work | Voluntary work in the Social Inclusion Race Empowerment Network |
| Area | Newton, Birmingham (U.K) |
| Education and Professional Training | Psychological therapy, alternative and holistic psychiatric services to women with mental health problems |
| Professional areas of interest | Empowering women and black people; |
| Areas of Expertise | Mental health therapies, women empowerment, cultural/ethnic perspective |

PROJECT PROFILE

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| Participant | Alison Reeves |
| Area | Newton, Birmingham (U.K) |
| Project | Carnival Group |
| Theme | Social cohesion, women empowerment through culture |

Socio-economic context

An inner city area of Birmingham called Newtown where a group called "CDG" meet on a Friday night and local young people come to drum and do poetry. The group is quite male orientated and majority is Caribbean.



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In Birmingham, inner city areas are inhabited mostly by ethnic minorities from African or Afro-Caribbean descent, normally talked of as an "area of high deprivation" with quite a high crime rate. In Birmingham, inner city areas are normally more deprived than suburbs which are higher class.

Project description and objectives

In Birmingham the Caribbean carnival has involved less and less people at a grassroots level since the city council took it over. We wanted to learn how to make carnival costumes so that we as a group could participate in the carnival. I was the project coordinator for this. Also the group is quite contained, for example it is mainly Caribbean and male participants who play leading roles.

The objectives were:

- For the women in the group to play a more active role.
- For CDG to widen their profile of activities from purely drumming and poetry to carnival involvement.
- For those involved to learn a high degree of carnival costume making skills that could open other opportunities.
- To bring together two communities of people, CDG and Martineau gardens volunteers who are mainly white people.

We worked with Mahogany Community Ventures from London ensuring a very high standard of skills was being learnt.

The workshops involved men, women and children, mainly women and children.

A small payment was made to participants enabling people to make the time to commit to the project. (£5 per hour). Hours were flexible so mothers could take part. You were paid for the time you came.

Children were actively involved, for example we took some of the designs from their drawings and they did more simple tasks like cutting out foam.

The workshops involved 2 groups who had not worked together before in order to provide a cultural exchange aspect and widen people's horizons and diverse experiences.

The group went to London and took part in Nottinghill Carnival with Mahogany Carnival Club, and came second out of 80 clubs on the road. Everyone was very proud and amazed by the beautiful costumes we made utilising everyone's skills.



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Results, evaluation and obstacles

Results evaluation

We made a DVD of the project which was The African Roots of Carnival.

Obstacles

The paid co-ordinator from CDG was not really able to do the job as he didn't have the experience of the carnival. I had to take on a lot of this role on a voluntary basis.

We found that other members of CDG were not really aware of why the project was happening and so they found it a bit threatening. This was solved by going to the drumming group, talking to more people and involving them in the project.



Resources (financial and human)

The project cost £5000 which was a Community Chest grant.



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Lessons learned

People do not have to have already existing skills to take part in something like this, because carnival is so multi faceted something can be found for everyone. Mahogany were excellent facilitators in bringing the best out in each individual and involving the children too.

It is important to **raise the aspiration of the group by doing challenging things** because there was a real sense of awe in what we had created. Mahogany were very good at stretching us in our abilities.

Bringing 2 groups of people together who wouldn't normally meet can be really great where it works. A lot of misconceptions about what white or black people are like were broken down as we worked together as a team. It helped to bring people out of their everyday routine and thus be a transforming experience on many levels.

