

## **Mentoring Network Profiles**

As part of the action learning methodology underpinning this project, an online mentor's network has been established. The mentors in the Network are participants of the project who have considerable experience of working in regeneration projects/areas and therefore are able to offer support and advice to others who are promoting gender equality in regeneration programmes.

Each profile provides two elements:

- Firstly a short professional profile
- Secondly, a profile of an action or project that they have undertaken.

## Alina Cuartas de Marchena



### PROFESSIONAL PROFILE

<b>Current Work</b>	I am manager of “Stichting TREF”, an NGO which goals are the fight against discrimination and racism and the promotion of a multicultural society
<b>Area</b>	Pendrecht area, District of Charlois, Rotterdam, The Netherlands
<b>Education and Professional Training</b>	Intercultural communication
<b>Professional areas of interest</b>	Fight against discrimination and racism; promoting of a multicultural society; developing community-based programmes to promote social cohesion; involve women specifically on the labour market
<b>Areas of Expertise</b>	Empowerment, multiculturalism

### PROJECT PROFILE

<b>Participant</b>	<a href="#">Alina Cuartas de Marchena</a>
<b>Area</b>	Pendrecht, District of Charlois, Rotterdam, The Netherlands
<b>Project</b>	Stichting TREF
<b>Theme</b>	<b>Women empowerment</b>

### Socio-economic context

Charlois is a district within the municipality of Rotterdam. It is the home to 67000 inhabitants. The population is mixed, so are cultures. In Charlois, the percentage of inhabitants of ethnic minority background has raised from 38% to 49% between 1996 and 2002. In some parts of the districts, this proportion reaches 66%. The largest group is made up of people originating from Surinam (9,2%) and from Turkey (6,8%). The fastest growing community is the Antillean community (West Indies).

In the area within the District of Charlois where I work, which is called Pendrecht, the percentage of inhabitants on social benefits or unemployed is 11,7% inhabitant (Rotterdam

average: 7,6 % and Charlois's average: 10%). 20% of people in the District of Charlois are children, 50% of whom are educated by their single mother<sup>1</sup>.

I have worked mostly in Pendrecht, one of Charlois's neighbourhoods built in the 1950's. The families that settled in at that time have grown old and little by little are moving to retirement homes. Nowadays, the remaining original inhabitants mostly white and in their seventies, live next to an increasing number of young families of ethnic minority backgrounds. Part of the neighbourhood is dilapidated; some of it is slowly being rebuilt.

In this neighbourhood –and in Charlois in general- there are big private corporations owing a lot of housing which is rented out. Market considerations guide housing restoration: some houses are renovated or rebuilt when the investment is believed to be compensated by higher rents. Actually, it seems to be the case that the neighbourhood where I work, Pendrecht is undergoing a transition towards attracting higher income people.

In the future, the area might become more mixed income-wise. The municipality, as well as the inhabitants, is looking forward to such a change. At the moment, incomes in the area are still quite low however with people who came in ten years ago: Turks and a big group of Antilleans (especially people coming from Curacao). These two groups are large, they have many children. Single mothers are common amongst the Antillean group.

Antilleans from Curacao are Dutch from the Dutch Antilles which is part of the Kingdom of Netherlands. This group of people hardly speaks Dutch, and many of them travel back and forth between Curacao and the Netherlands. Most of them hold low or no skill jobs, including in the informal sector.

### **Project description and objectives**

I did two training courses for women in Pendrecht, with two groups of women made up of Antillean, Turkish, Algerian, Congolese, Eritrean, Cap Verdian and Chinese women. We tried to mix these women to get them involved. A selection criteria was that they were able to write. The key issue was about empowering them; firstly by giving them tools to work together, in the community, and identifying each other's strengths.

These women had very low self esteem to start with. To raise their self-esteem also implied to help them identify what were their interests. We would then work to provide them with basic skills so that they could tap into the help that public services or the society provided for: we would teach them to use a phone book, enquire and use available social services, such as basic computer courses, language courses... The first goal was to **help them help themselves**.

My project did not provide computer courses but I could stimulate these women to look for that computer course which they identified and which they needed to follow.

### **Empowerment requires women to:**

- Identify their own needs

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<sup>1</sup> More information in Dutch about District Charlois is available on : <http://www.charlois-welzijn.nl/> ; <http://www.tarwewijk.nl/page.php> ; <http://www.wrr.nl/pdfdocumenten/V8.pdf>

- Identify their strengths and weaknesses: the women were so much better at identifying their weaknesses than they were about pointing to their strengths. Some women, I recall were single mothers who were looking after 5 children: they obviously had budget management and logistic skills.
- Use their strengths to promote their interest; and if they wanted to, to use their strength and contribute to the community.

The prime objective was to empower the women in my groups. And maybe get them involved in community work as volunteers if they were willing to (in schools or other community work).

My project was not employment related, but some women did move on to jobs, and couple of women decided to go back to school after the training (further Dutch classes, child caring courses, elderly care...).

In practice this is how it worked: we had a room where women would sit in circle looking towards each other. There was a course leader who would give individual or small group tasks.

It started with small assignments such as looking for a name in a telephone book. There were also communication exercises: I would tell a story and the task was to learn how to listen and how to respond. We would also sum up by name each other's weak points and strong points, which is an important empowerment exercise.

After that, women were charged with organising an event or a street party. The scope was to write down the logistics of organising such an event: they would have to think of each step, identify actions to be taken and think of solutions in case of problems. After that, they would start contacting people at the municipality to set up this event, preparing their questions in advance.. They were very able to organise festive events based on cooking and eating, but we wanted them to do more, **make them outreach and look out towards the community.**

At the end of the course, women were asked to identify the progresses they had made, identify and name their objectives from then on. **They were not used to think in terms of their own needs and development.**

## **Results, evaluation and obstacles**

### Obstacles

1. The first obstacle was to recruit women: this can be a difficult step, and it is certainly challenging. I wanted to find women who met certain requirements and get them motivated enough to join in a first meeting. I wanted to reach women who were not involved in the community. I had to network, use contacts in the neighbourhood. In one of the groups, one woman brought her friends along (one of the reasons why this kind of project has to be longer than 10 weeks is also that the recruiting period can take a few weeks).
2. My two groups were financed from September for two weeks: I had to do the recruitment in summer when many families are absent. This was a real challenge.
3. Finances are always a challenge, especially because I would have wanted a more intense/longer/durable/followed-up project. I would have liked to set durable contacts. This was however impossible due to the way funding works.
4. Child care issues were sometimes problematic but we managed to get around the problem quite easily.

### Evaluation of results

The result that ought to be evaluated is the extent to which the project helped women be involved in the community, in a way or another.

Some women became volunteer workers; some joined further training or schooling: this is how I evaluate results.

Of course, there is also a report, a paper for the funding organisation.

## **Resources (financial and human)**

You need at least a good class room or training room, available on a regular basis

You need a trainer who has skills in group work, some sense of how it is to work with different groups, and who has feeling towards different groups. In the Netherlands, this training skill is referred to as “intercultural communication”.

In the Netherlands, the trend in policy is to encourage and fund “multiculturalism”. Mono-cultural or single community projects do not get funded. The scope is to form mix groups in order to be eligible for social municipality funds.

The project I presented is chaperoned by an NGO and subsidies come from the municipality of Charlois. (funds for multicultural development).

The project was at most 10 weeks. It is a good length. The courses were 3 hours sessions, once a week. But that is too little I think.

I think some women do have time, and these women are very very motivated to learn, and to be occupied and to feel useful. One woman once said she had given birth to three children and now she wanted to become more learned, more informed. I think that many women would have been happy to meet twice a week for 20 weeks. It would be better.

Also, I think it was a pity that there was no follow up after that training but such are the limitations of funding!

### **Lessons learned**

That once they are given the opportunity, **women really do want to learn and want to give a contribution** to the society.

I learnt that it is a lot of fun to work with these groups of women; it gives you the opportunity to rethink your own way of thinking .You learn a lot about yourself, and you learn how to use your language to be better understood by others.

I learnt that in many of these communities, **women are binding cement that holds the community together.**

## Alison Reeves



### PROFESSIONAL PROFILE

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

### PROJECT PROFILE

<b>Participant</b>	<a href="#">Alison Reeves</a>
<b>Area</b>	Newton, Birmingham (U.K)
<b>Project</b>	Carnival Group
<b>Theme</b>	<b><a href="#">Social cohesion, women empowerment through culture</a></b>

### 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.

In Birmingham, inner city area 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 co-ordinator 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.

## **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.

### 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.



## Anneke De Goede



### PROFESSIONAL PROFILE

<b>Current Work</b>	Managing director
<b>Area</b>	Charlois, Rotterdam, The Netherlands
<b>Education and Professional Training</b>	Social Management Studies, Netherlands
<b>Professional areas of interest</b>	People who don't have many changes in these society, homeless, women of all kind of cultures, young people
<b>Areas of Expertise</b>	Managing, organising, developing new and innovating initiatives

### PROJECT PROFILE

<b>Participant</b>	<a href="#">Anneke De Goede</a>
<b>Area</b>	District of Charlois, Rotterdam, the Netherlands
<b>Project</b>	Cleo-Patria Women Centres
<b>Theme</b>	<b>Women empowerment: Every body has qualities who can be used for other people and society</b>

### Socio-economic context

Charlois is a district within the municipality of Rotterdam. The population is mixed, so are cultures. If I recall well, there are 66 nationalities living in district Charlois. The women centre "Cleopatria" is frequented by women of 32 nationalities.

The percentage of inhabitants of ethnic minority background has raised from 38% to 49% between 1996 and 2002. In some parts of the districts, this proportion reaches 66%. The largest group is made up of people originating from Surinam (9,2%) and from Turkey (6,8%). The fastest growing community is the Antillean community (West Indies).

The district is quite poor, 10% of the population live off social benefits (about 6700 in 2002). 20% of people in Charlois are children 50% of whom are educated by their single mother.



## **Project description and objectives**

The project that I want to present is the Women Centres “Cleo-patria”<sup>2</sup>. The first thing I want to do is describe the centres: they are clean, colourful, neat.



The first step to develop a woman centre in an area is to look for women in that area, and ask them to help designing it. Neighbourhood women must have a sense of ownership towards the centre.

The second step is to find one woman who will be a host. In this centre, there are 70 volunteers. Everyone who volunteers in participating to the centre is accepted. Most people who frequent the centre can't read or write. Same goes for volunteers. We don't look for education but skills, capacities building, in accordance to user's needs and requests.

Our main teaching activities revolve around:

- Dutch language courses and Dutch conversation courses
- Sewing
- Hosting skills: how to be a good host

It is voluntary workers who usually animate these courses, we try to work as little as possible with professionals. We only call onto professional teachers for short time courses or training. Because of policy constraints in the Netherlands, we are not allowed to hold mono-cultural activities with the funds we get for this women centre. The rationale behind this constraint is a better integration in society.

Take Charlois for example, it is a multicultural area; people from so many different ethnic origins live together. It is important that they learn to know each other. If you know each other, if you know each other's differences, you are better prepared to live together. If you know how a Turkish woman would react to some events, and if you understand, you are less likely to be irritated.

The objectives underlying the establishment and the activities of our women Centres are:

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<sup>2</sup> For more information on the project (in Dutch) : <http://www.pavem.nl/kcgs/show/id=169216/contentid=8348>

- Emancipation
- Participation
- Integration

These objectives can be reached better if women from all nationalities meet each other. Actually in one of the centres, there is one group of elderly Jamaican women who have been meeting for so many years and in that case, they are more at ease going on with their weekly meeting.

### Activities

The objectives laid down above are conveyed through all the activities organised by the centre. In line with the objective of participation, these activities are determined by women themselves. The first activity they usually ask for is Dutch lessons, the second is sewing. After that come: fitness, riding a bike, theatre, education and expression.

Organising such activities is never recreational only, there is always a balance between recreation and education: that is the scope of the women centres. And indeed, when women come to us they usually have very practical demands: they want to learn to communicate better and to sew, and gain mobility through riding! (You should know that riding a bike is a very popular means of transport in Rotterdam and in the Netherlands in general).

We create activity groups with those who want to participate: for example a group of 10 who want to sew, one of 20 for Dutch lessons, some Moroccan women may propose a Moroccan afternoon when they present Moroccan culture to the others... If a training course is highly requested and there is no volunteer who can teach that class, we may hire a professional trainer or teacher.

I think it is important for non-native women to seek for their own development, their place in the Dutch society. It is an inner development, an inner possession of themselves: becoming conscious of “who I am” and “what do I want”. This is the beginning of empowerment.

Most women I meet do not have self-confidence. In my view, they need self confidence; and they should be more independent from their husbands, be able to take decisions. They should be able to tell their husbands that they want to go to school or to the centre. For me, it is important that women become stronger: that is emancipation.

And I do not think that this will necessarily destabilize their marriage or hurt the family balance. It is a step-by-step process.

It has been observed that women who come here to the centre are also less likely to go to the doctor. They say they are happier and look better after their children. The husbands notice that and hence this is also good for their marriage’s equilibrium. When husbands come to ask what their wives do at the centre, we tell them!

In one of the centres, there is a husband group as well as a husbands and wives group. One of our core points for next year is domestic violence: doing work with the husbands and fathers, on the subject.

We talk amongst volunteers about how to reach men, husbands, in order to integrate better in the Dutch society. That is what women want: they want their husbands to know Dutch better so that their husbands can earn higher salaries. Take the case of a Turkish baker: he would be likely to be much better paid if he worked for a Dutch rather than a Turkish employer.

Women are women, with common expectations, that is the reason to build women centres. They all want a good future for their children, live in a safe area. That is what all the women long for, irrespective of origin.

After half a year of frequenting the centre, the women are more “self-conscious”, more aware of who they are and what they want. This is the beginning of “empowerment”.

Further to that, we encourage women to gain skills and get education. If they are up to it, we can pay tuition costs. We encourage women to contribute to the society, through volunteering in schools, for the area they live in, or work in public institutions.

We encourage them to contribute to one of our “businesses” or create their own small businesses in the catering industry or sewing traditional clothes for example, in order to earn a little extra money...

Cleo- Patria links women to all sorts of activities in the area and community. And some women are really enthusiastic about this step, that of gaining emancipation and independence. We really encourage women to move out of the women centre, to progressively gain confidence and get out in the community/society. We help women to find jobs. And we have good results!

All the volunteers who accept to teach or train others, receive a special training and receive a “training certificate” (*opmaat* in Dutch). This certificate is a professional asset if that person desires to become a trainer or a teacher later in life. Hence, we promote people who did not originally have any kind of formal skills to professionalism.

One of our successes is that women centres are considered safe places for women. And if you don’t want to do something or participate, you may not do anything. You take a cup of tea, and then you go!

But most women who frequent the centre are longing for personal development. A kind of success is also that women work for other women. They do all this for themselves and for each other.

Take the example of domestic violence. Most women do not talk about it. It is taboo. What we do is: we give them information. We do not talk of domestic violence itself: we rather talk of the rights and duties of women. We talk about domestic violence but we do not call the meeting explicitly that way. We do speak in small groups about real and practical problems, swearing confidentiality about what is said in the group. This confidentiality is always respected because speaking about such problems is a taboo. In such groups, women support each other. The aim is certainly not about women leaving their husbands or family, or encouraging them in this direction. Nor is our scope to send abused women to safe houses. The first step is to dare speak about it. Our aim was to solve or at least improve the situation. Our main goal is to limit the incidence of domestic violence. If they left their husbands, they would be very lonesome; this is not a solution. What we try to do during these meetings is to

get the women to realise that they want to stop being the victims of domestic violence. This is quite an achievement for these women. The first one who have to say “stop” are the women, the mothers, themselves. After that, we can have discussions with the children and the fathers.

Our strategy is not only to change women, it is to improve society, through women. When women want to do specific activities with men, they can ask for them: but such activities must only be set up if women ask for them. For me, it is not only important that women participate, emancipate and integrate in the society; it is important that the whole society develops, women and men too.

All the women centres are very very successful. I think this success is linked to the bottom-up development approach, the day to day management of activities by the women themselves, the fact that all decisions are made by them, that all the voluntaries have a word to say, that every culture and nationality is respected.

## **Results, evaluation and obstacles**

### Obstacles

- We do not work in a traditional way. We are a threat to those who are traditional such as more formal organisations providing welfare. They are afraid of our success; they are afraid that the state would cut their funding because we reach better results;
- Finance is always a problem;
- Some communities, such as the Eritrean, have been more difficult to reach but now, we managed to reach some members of these communities so that it should become easier to link with them in time. This is a community that is very closed upon itself. This is not linked to the fact that they would have arrived more recently.. I do not know why.. Religion? Culture? In general however, outreaching towards new women is not an obstacle, really: word of mouth information travels very well.

### Evaluation of results

Women decide which activities they want to hold on a weekly basis so that evaluation and satisfaction enquiries are an ongoing process built into the organisation of the centres. Every person who visits the centre is entitled to express wishes.

Another evidence of our success are the following:

- We reach 800 women every week, of 30-40 nationalities;
- 200 women follow Dutch classes;
- 15 women are following education and are sponsored by us;
- Last year, 10 women entered formal employment.

We do ongoing evaluations with women every week in a meeting in each centre: we go over what we can improve and what went wrong.

## **Resources (financial and human)**

Cleo-Patria has a board of 6 employees. Work in the centers is done by 40 volunteers. If we add to that number the women volunteers who have moved to doing volunteer work for public services such as schools and museums, our catering “business”, the number raises to 55.

Our financial resources are provided by the municipality (also some Dutch courses are provided by the municipality). We also get funding from private sponsors and businesses as well as foundations.

The buildings, we all rent. We only get, on a temporary basis, to use rooms from the local building corporation. The local building corporations consider that it is a win-win situation for them to encourage women projects in the community because they contribute to raising the safety, quality of life and comfort to the neighbourhood.

## **Lessons learned**

I learnt not to be afraid to let the others make their own mistakes.

I also learnt that women are more able than what they think. I am impressed by what they can do, by how strong they are. Women are very determined to develop themselves.

Working with all kind of people has enriched my personal life. The time I spent with people from all those different cultures has made me more aware of my own. I didn't think of it before. It is a very important lesson.

Another lesson is that what comes out in the media in the Netherlands is that we are afraid of other cultures, but when you work with other cultures, you enrich yourself.

Through reaching the women, you reach the whole family. After all, it is them who educate their children, the girls and boys of the next generation. Women can do so many things; when you reach them, the whole area changes. I am very impressed.

Several years ago, I thought that Turkish women were not educated, that they were dumb. I did not understand why they did not speak Dutch. Now I understand the loneliness. The Dutch society did not understand the loneliness of all these women who raised their children, most of whom are integrated and employed. After 30 years, they are criticized by the Dutch government. I however believe that these women have done a great job for the Dutch society.

**Every body has qualities that can be used for other people and society.**



## Antonio La Banca



### PROFESSIONAL PROFILE

<b>Current Work</b>	President of a Parents' Group "AGO - Associazione Genitori Oggi" ("ago" means "needle": we would sew good relationship)
<b>Area</b>	Aurora - Porta Palazzo Area, Torino (ITALY)
<b>Education and Professional Training</b>	Degree in industrial chemistry Counsellor in Intellectual Property Course of Journalism with a private school
<b>Professional areas of interest</b>	As President of AGO: Improving the relationship between school and families, better integration of children in the school system, making the parents care and be involved
<b>Areas of Expertise</b>	As President of AGO: Conciliation, organising activities for children, involving parents especially mothers of foreign origin in their children's education and school

### PROJECT PROFILE

<b>Participant</b>	<a href="#">Antonio Rocco La Banca</a> , AGO President
<b>Area</b>	Porta Palazzo, Torino (ITALY)
<b>Project</b>	Associazione Genitori Oggi (AGO)
<b>Theme</b>	<a href="#">School and Families</a>

### Socio-economic context

The area where the association "Genitori Oggi" meaning "Parents Today" in Italian, is a problematic area called Porta Palazzo. It is right in the city centre of Torino, in the North of Italy.

These areas are inner suburbs, characterized by a high concentration of social exclusion and conflicts due to the poorness and cohabitation of different communities and cultures.

It's an area home to a large proportion of immigrants. The percentage of foreign-origin children in the 4 schools which the association works in is 80%. These children come from 32 different countries, but they are mostly Maghrebans and Rumanians. This makes up a particularly delicate situation with potentially a high risk of clashes. This situation isn't being looked at with the necessary attention by school institutions. On top of that, school institutions lack specific competences to deal with this particular context.

When problematic cases started to explode, the association's members-to-be interceded as informal conciliators to help resolve the conflict. This is, in a few words the context in which the association was born in 2003.

### **Project description and objectives**

Antonio La Banca is the president of a schools' parents association which was set up about 2 years ago (in 2003). The organisation aimed to organize formally a number of actions already taken informally by some parents. At that time, a group of parents organized themselves to form an electoral list with a clear programme with the scope of presenting themselves in the school board's elections. The main points of this programme were: improvement of the full-time school system and courses, improvement of after-hours training courses on offer, and integration.

The main purposes of the association are: to improve the relationship between school and families, to point out families' needs and give answers through self-help actions.

Amongst the actions undertaken by the association, the first one is to provide better and more in-depth information, hence tackle the lack of information which many parents suffer.

Another objective is to promote self-reciprocal help between parents, for example about children transport, or meetings to exchange ideas and discuss education matters.

Integration is a priority theme as well: the association tries to promote activities allowing to discover the different cultures and traditions represented at school, in order to overcome prejudices through mutual comprehension.

Moreover, an activity focusing specifically at immigrant parents is foreseen: meeting foreign parents to explain what their children learn at school and how. This is obviously a way for the parents to learn, at the same time.

The association proposes also that a foreign parent representative participate in the school management: this proposal came out as it appeared clearly that it would lead foreign parents to give a constructive contribution to the school management board, and not only pressing claims.

Some other activities are organised for the children, such as extra-curriculum karate and modern dance courses. These courses are given by parents.

### **Results, evaluation and obstacles**

The expectation at the beginning was to create a sort of “parents’ club”, with plenty of activities not necessarily strictly connected to the school. But for the development of such an ambitious idea, great investment in time and care is necessary, while it seems that school is not considered a priority for the majority of parents.

In fact, the hardest obstacle encountered is the majority of parents’ state of mind. Most of them consider themselves just as school users, and not part of the school community.

Also, involving mothers of foreign origin has been a challenge.

I am personally convinced that the integration between different cultures passes among relationships between women, because they are the most involved persons in the care of children. They have more occasions to meet each other in accompanying their children to school, in waiting for them at the exit when they come out from school. Meeting in the school when preparation of sweets and other dishes is required are very important to overcome diffidence and learning about each other’s habits and customs.

**But this natural stream of informal meetings must be coupled, with a “cultural” education in the host country about differences and about social organisations.**

As women are actors of “meeting” and “getting-together”, they are also actors of conflicts. These conflicts may stem as mothers defend their own children from aggressions by other students. I can think of one example of a conflict situation that came up when a certain number of parents had judged that the Nigerian mother of a pupil was a prostitute.

In periods of “crisis”, it is easy that we see groups of mothers based on ethnic affinities. This can be based on the fact that these mothers share particular customs for example. That is why I think that this natural stream of informal meetings should be coupled with an effort to encourage cultural education about differences, to encourage meetings across groups.

Another obstacle is that the association has to face the school system’s inertia and resistance as well, as its administration is not open enough to receive proposals from non-professional sources.

Last but not least, there are big difficulties in finding human and financial resources.

In spite of these difficulties, the association has obtained growing credibility and authoritativeness.

### **Resources (financial and human)**

The human resources are limited to the voluntary parents’ contributions.

The association can use some school spaces, but they are available only before 6 pm, and this doesn’t match very well the parents’ availabilities, who are often free only after work.

At financial level, the only resources are the subscription fees, 10 € per person (50 people are currently members of the association).

Most people in the association are mothers. We sustained and obtained election - during year 2004 - of a mother as president of the Consiglio di Circolo (School Council), an institution stated by Law. This woman is the “Secretary” of our Association.

It is not secondary evidence that most of the teachers at level of basic school (maternal and elementary) in Italy are women, so that the role that they could play is particularly directed to the relations with mothers than with fathers of their groups.

Another resource is missing, but it would be extremely useful: that is a reference person, maybe an educator, a psychologist or a social assistant, permanently present at school. Its function would be link the school with the families, developing a relationship network. It would be easier and more efficient to organise the parents’ voluntary work around this reference person.

### **Lessons learned**

Thanks to the contact with “The Gate” and the project “Latent Potential”, there’s a growing awareness of the importance of the women’s role.

#### **>> The role of women is central in the actions undertaken and foreseen.**

Given the fact that mothers, especially for the foreign families, are more present in relation to children and school, the actions of the association (for example the courses for parents) should concern mostly women.

Furthermore, the courses for the children are held by women, who are protagonist in these spaces.

Finally, resulting from recent reflections, it is foreseen to set up an exchange meeting to bring out female sensibility on the core issues dear to the parents’ association: learning, training and integration.

## Dipana Patel



### PROFESSIONAL PROFILE

<b>Current Work</b>	Local Strategic Partnerships Officer, Northamptonshire County Council
<b>Area</b>	Northamptonshire County (UK)
<b>Education and Professional Training</b>	Proactively involved with care for the elderly and latterly community development ; extensive experience in equality and anti-discrimination
<b>Professional areas of interest</b>	Currently my voluntary work includes : vice chair of Northamptonshire Racial Equality Council; Justice of Peace (magistrate); Member of the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) East Regional Advisory Council
<b>Areas of Expertise</b>	Woman empowerment and fight against racism

### PROJECT PROFILE

<b>Participant</b>	<a href="#">Dipana Patel</a>
<b>Area</b>	Northamptonshire County, United Kingdom of Great Britain
<b>Project</b>	Equality Council and life experience in empowerment
<b>Theme</b>	<b><a href="#">Woman empowerment and fight against racism in the socio-political fields</a></b>

### Socio-economic context

The County of Northamptonshire is situated south East of Birmingham, it is characterized by pockets of wealth and pockets of great poverty. The global representation of ethnic minorities in the County is 10%, mostly concentrated in the city of Northampton. Traditionally, the County's economy was dominated by manufacturing.

I am going to present my personal experience and involvement in a voluntary capacity in the Racial Equality Council (an organization run by voluntaries) in order to illustrate how every one has this potential and can contribute to improve equality in our society, despite the challenges.

I was born in Uganda where my father was a respected man: he was involved in the community and made people from various ethnic backgrounds work together. When Uganda

gained independence, we had to leave and my family lost everything. My father lost everything as an immigrant in the United Kingdom, except his experience, his will. He never gave up of what he knew was right and this is reflected in how I approach life.

As a child here, I suffered extreme forms of racism, at school and outside school<sup>3</sup>, part of which I thought could have been challenged, had I been a boy. This is the context on which I built my involvement in the Racial Equality Council.

### **Project description and objectives**

I joined the Wellingborough Racial Equality Council (an organization run by voluntaries).

Information on the Wellingborough Racial Equality Council can be found on the internet: <http://www.northamptonshirerec.org.uk/>. The Northamptonshire REC's vision is to challenge and eradicate racial discrimination (both personal and institutional) and racial prejudice or hostility in all its forms; so that all Northamptonshire's diverse communities and citizens can enjoy peace, achieve their full potential and live free from injustice. The Council aims for a socially cohesive society in which diversity is recognized, celebrated and valued.

The aims are to:

- Assist and support individuals and groups who have suffered racial discrimination, harassment or injustice
- Campaign and develop strategies to influence public opinion, legislation, practices and procedures to tackle racial inequality and discrimination and to promote social and community cohesion
- Work closely with black and ethnic minority communities to enable them to develop their own organizations and strengths
- Work in partnership with others - other Racial Equality Councils (regionally and nationally), the Commission for Racial Equality, voluntary organizations, local authorities and public bodies in the achievement of the REC's objectives and realize its vision

The Council was mixed ethnically, there were a couple of Asians, but they were mostly men. There were only a few women, white. I joined because that experience of being a female subject to racism. I wanted to fight back with politics. I noticed that I was young, I was a woman and I had experienced racism personally.

My first objective was tackling racial discrimination, but within that, there was a gender challenge too. I wanted to make sure that within the management operations of the Council, a male dominated field, the voice of women was heard.

I wanted:

- Equal representation

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<sup>3</sup> Also read: [http://www.bbc.co.uk/northamptonshire/content/articles/2005/02/08/bhp\\_dipana\\_patel\\_feature.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/northamptonshire/content/articles/2005/02/08/bhp_dipana_patel_feature.shtml)

- Getting the voice of women heard so as to affect positively the way in which the organization operates
- Making sure that the organization worked efficiently so that people who needed support would get it

To do that I started getting involved in every activity within the organization, even if I did not understand: I went to meetings, read etc.

I wanted to understand why this organization wasn't there when I needed it and wanted to challenge its rigidity. I think I didn't know about that organization at school and my school didn't take its responsibilities.

The best thing I had was innocence, and I was never afraid to ask questions. Innocent questions catch people out.

With time I got to understand the management of that organization. I thought it needed to redirect its options. Hence I became a Committee Member, one of the youngest.

Most Committee members had a day time job. They were in the situation I am in now. But that was fifteen years ago. When I saw the Committee working, I realized that it needed different operating mode, because it wasn't doing well. It wasn't focusing of existing issues. It dealt with victims of racial discrimination, immigration case-work, legal advice, communication about immigration, employment, training, politics, lobbying, things about communication, letting people know their rights. The organisation pretended to do many things with a too little budget. We knew what the issues were, we knew what we wanted to improve, we knew that we could not change it all over-night and we knew we needed to have money to do some of the work. The organization needed focus again. The focus we gave it was: education and social care.

In the organization, we looked at how they communicated with schools: how teachers taught race education, how to ensure that people felt at ease reporting race bullying. One of the major obstacles we faced was people not recognizing the issues of race and gender discrimination: people with power, teachers, police, parents groups...

I went to schools, talked with children, and explained the bullying that I faced, for me as a woman, it gave me power. I could address my own fears. Being involved in all these stages gave me training and experience to use in my career. We have so many skills which we can adapt. Women are much more flexible.

When there was an opportunity to do something different, I wanted to be part of it: take part, join training sessions.

I was a Committee Member now, the only ways to reorganize the organisation and steer it in a new direction was being a Senior Member within the Committee (I did not want to become a chairperson because I am not so good at money).

I asked if I could be vice-chairman and so it happened. Over the years, I had good experience to replace the chair. I also gained my own confidence as a person.

## **Results, evaluation and obstacles**

During the course of this trajectory, there were no visible obstacles: the organization allowed anyone to join in; however, it happened that members were mostly male and their say was predominant. So there were challenges indeed.

I had the time, and I was not scared to ask simple questions such as: How did you spend that money? How do you know the money we give out reaches the right people? Why is it me who makes tea and coffee?

The keys to success are patience, thorough understanding and seeing what is being achieved. Seeing is believing: where I see something, I believe it; if you treat me equally, I believe in equality.

My way as a chair was making sure everyone was involved and making sure that practically, women could take part in meetings (because the Committee would pay the babysitter for example).

I became chair of the organization. Once I got there we knew we had to rethink goals. I was certain that we weren't doing things for free. We needed to be paid. We needed financial resources.

The Council, for example, would pay for external trainers. We decided to work at top level. We couldn't address single schools directly and needed to go through the school authority. We were able to do that using the legal framework. You have to use what you have got. That was our weapon and that was rewarding too.

At that time, I was single, only after fifteen years I had my family and decided to take a year off. Now, I've gone back to the organization as a committee member. The organization has spread to county level.

## **Whoever you are, you have something to contribute**

As chairman, I made a memorial to the victims of the holocaust in Wellingborough, and launched ceremonies. People did not want to take part because people were afraid. They do not understand the whole picture; they do not understand the holocaust, the genocide. Now it has become part of education.

## **Resources (financial and human)**

More information about the Race Equality Council can be found on:  
<http://www.northamptonshirerec.org.uk/busplan/bp0.asp>.

Regarding my personal experience, I think that the keys to success are patience, thorough understanding and seeing what is being achieved.

## **Lessons learned**



**Society needs immigrants, black women, to stand out.** You have to believe in yourself. It is the most powerful belief you can have. Be prepared to speak, show your actions.

Never say no to a challenge: if you do you fail before trying. If you fail after trying, you can learn at least.

I learnt to **just accept that some people you are never going to change.** Then you learn to work around them: if these people don't accept what is changing and improving in society, it is their loss, certainly not ours.

Continuously ask questions; never be afraid to ask naïve questions to achieve thorough understanding.

**Never say no to a challenge, that is how one learns.**

The keys to achieve a fairer and better society are determination, patience, thorough understanding and seeing with your eyes what is being achieved, going to see, on the grounds, what happens: don't believe things have changed until you see they have. I can only be satisfied that actions have been successful if I see the result: only if you treat me equally, I believe in equality.

These business men, they don't build their job overnight! It takes time. Same as with raising a family. **It takes time.**

## Felisa Velasco



### PROFESSIONAL PROFILE

<b>Current Work</b>	Member of the Toledo City Council. Member of the Province of Toledo Council
<b>Area</b>	Toledo, Spain
<b>Education and Professional Training</b>	Diploma as a primary school teacher at the University School of Toledo.(Escuela Universitaria de Toledo). Degree in Pedagogics at the UNED. Previous work: Advisor for psycho-pedagogic matters in the secondary education.
<b>Professional areas of interest</b>	Member of the Province of Toledo Council in charge of the Assistance to Municipalities in Education matters;
<b>Areas of Expertise</b>	Gender Equality, Education

### PROJECT PROFILE

<b>Participant</b>	<a href="#">Felisa Velasco</a>
<b>Area</b>	Toledo, Spain
<b>Project</b>	Consultant in Psycho-Pedagogic Orientation in Institutes of Secondary Education
<b>Theme</b>	<a href="#">School and Families</a>

### Socio-economic context

Castilla-La Mancha is one of the least populated region in Spain, with a surface of 80000 squared Km and just 1800000 inhabitants: 908125, a bit more than half of them, are women, while 20% of the population is older than 65, and 24% is composed of women older than 65.

This ageing process of the population is due to migration during the last century which produced a massive depopulating dynamic, but in the last 10 years we can see a trend reversal due to an immigration which has corrected the previous migration movements.

Castilla-La mancha is composed of 919 municipalities, but nearly all of them live in very small villages, just 59 of them have more than 5000 inhabitants. As many as 800 municipalities are less populated than 3000 inhabitants, and 9,8% of the population live in villages with less than 1000 persons. 4 persons out of 10 live in towns with less than 5000 inhabitants. So the population is very spread out in little villages in the middle of a very extended area (this is the third most extended region in Spain).

The borders of this region are the Autonomous Community of Madrid, in the north, Andalucía in the south, and Extremadura and Portugal in the east side.

Historically, Castilla was a region forgotten and left behind by governments and kings, but since democracy and the entry in the E.U. it has known an incredible development, which in 25 years has completely changed its look and its deeper social and economic structure.

From being mainly based on agriculture, its economy has become now service-oriented, even though still 10% of the active population is employed in agriculture.

A heritage from the past is the heavy unemployment rate affecting women three times more than men: in the fourth term of 2004 the males' unemployment rate was 5,66% on the active population, versus the 16,90 of the women's one; the rate of the males' employment gets up to 66,53%, while the women's is stuck at 36,38%. But this is just a synchronic picture, which does not register a dynamic movement, changes and improvements; we can say that women are integrating in the professional life more and more in the region: in four years (2001-2004) the women's employment rate had an increase of 5,5%, and in 2004 3 new jobs created out of 4 were taken by women. This is due to the new positive discrimination policies carried out by the regional government, and the new attention developed since the 90's to the issue of a higher women's participation.

Toledo is the Capital City of the autonomous Region Castilla- La Mancha: in this system based on devolution of powers the government here lies in the "Junta de Comunidades" of Castilla la Mancha. This institution comprises a Women Institute and a Project for Equality, which affects and concerns all of us at a regional level. You can also check for reference the web page of the Junta [www.jccm.es](http://www.jccm.es). The Province Council ("Diputación") does not have any specific programme concerning gender equality and women, even though many people in charge of policies and programmes are gender focused.

### **Project description and objectives**

### **Key issues and problems to be addressed**

I am married, mother of three children, and have been contributing actively to society since 20 years, taking into consideration either my professional activity out of my family environment, and my family tasks.

I have been working for 12 years in different primary schools in the Province of Toledo, fighting actively for the gender equality and recognition of the women rights in the labour market and in a professional frame: equality towards the pupils, equality in the decision making process, equality in the appointing process of managing positions with a certain degree.

I give contributions and I participate to seminars and workshops of Co-education and equality.

As Consultant in Psycho-Pedagogic Orientation in Institutes of Secondary Education, I keep the same attitude and the same focus in carrying out my activity and targeting my purposes, taking into account that the social and cultural context where my action takes place are villages with 1000 to 10000 inhabitants, in rural areas, where the gender differences are stronger, as in the pupils mentality as well as in the teachers'.

For two years I have been taking a political commitment and working as town councillor at the Toledo City Council, for the Socialist Party group, in the opposition, and at the same time as a member of the Province of Toledo Council for the matters concerning assistance to Municipalities and training.

The province Council is an institution established by the new Constitution of 1978, whose purpose is the organization of the Province of Toledo, comprising 200 municipalities of different size and with different needs. The Province Council is in charge of balancing the differences between the municipalities, in the name of the principle of solidarity, it is in charge of giving technical, economic and legal support to them as well as training courses not only to its own workers but also to people working for the City Councils of the Province.

#### Objectives delivered and actions taken

In September 2004 I was invited by the FEMP-CLM (Federation of Municipalities of Castilla-La Mancha) to participate to a workshop of the Latent Potential Programme, taking place in Belfast. More concretely I participated to a Peer Review: during the different sessions we got to know the issues affecting the Belfast environment and two concrete experiences. We analysed phenomenons of social destructuring because of political and religious conflicts, and the need of basic welfare services for a better childhood care. In the social setting where I come from there were no social issues like that, but nowadays we assist to new social problems related to the childhood care and education, notably referred to the immigrant population, a very recent issue in Toledo.

Analysing the projects carried out in Belfast, results and objectives we got several suggestions on how to act in our situation, and progress in the future also concerning the social and professional involvement of women as for controlling and implementing the programmes.

#### Results, evaluation and obstacles

Being a Member of the Province of Toledo Council I participate to the political decision making process: in my area of expertise and interest, ie. assistance to Municipalities and Education, positive discrimination policies are not carried out concerning gender equality matters.

Discrimination against women exists, but not at the level of the Province Local Government and in professional terms: the access to working positions is equal for men and women, as well as salaries and working conditions.

The obstacles and real discrimination lies in the cultural and social system based on domestic work for women, which is now a second activity for every working woman. But specific projects have not been launched, and it is very difficult to change mentalities and deep social structure with political means.

### **Lessons learned**

The lessons I could learn from this experience are several, and can be summed up this way:

- When you face concrete needs, you have to look absolutely for solutions, and make many efforts to sort something out;
- Working in a public position, and having taken a political commitment, there is the absolute need of listening to citizens, in order to try, from the positions you have in public institution, to solve the basic problems of society.
- The Belfast project is meeting its inhabitants' concrete needs. I will have to make sure that when I advise policy changes, I am meeting the real needs of people.

This project itself cannot be transferred and applied to my local situation, as the issues focused are not the same: but the rules, and the methodology, of implementation are the same: **identifying needs, trying to meet them in the short, medium and long term, involving the social actors in the process of finding solutions, and controlling and accompanying the process.**

## Floriana Tortato

### PROFESSIONAL PROFILE

<b>Current Work</b>	COGES Social Cooperative (Social Consulting Agency): promotion of professional insertion;
<b>Area</b>	Venice, Italy
<b>Education and Professional Training</b>	Diploma of Educator and Professional Community Animator;
<b>Professional areas of interest</b>	Social and Labour Policies; Training and Employment Disadvantaged People; Area-Based Resources
<b>Areas of Expertise</b>	Educator and Professional Community Animator

### PROJECT PROFILE

<b>Participant</b>	Floriana Tortato
<b>Area</b>	Venice (IT)
<b>Project</b>	Società CO.GE.S. Social Cooperative, Equal “Inclusion” Project (for the Venice Province): Member of one of the five Agencies named “Long-term unemployed females over 40 and males over 45 years old”
<b>Theme</b>	<b>Empowerment, excluded groups and unemployment</b>

### Socio-economic context

In the Veneto region and in Venice it has been very difficult to search for data concerning “unemployment” and “long term unemployment” as the sources (ISTAT, that is the National Institute for Statistics, Regions and Provinces) used to employ different indicators to define unemployment. For example for the Centre for Employment, a Province body, the unemployed person is the one who is immediately available for employment (but this body is just one of the agencies for employment and administrative problems don’t allow to update data). ISTAT uses a different method matching the European criteria, and defines the long term unemployed as the person registered as looking for a job for at least 12 months. For the EU we can talk about a “disadvantaged worker” when someone has problems in entering the labour market with no “assistance”. E.G older workers. So the question is about who is the person who cannot find a job in the province of Venice in 12 months. Who are they (age, sex, level of education)? Where can they be found?

So the sources of the data are very important in order to define the policies but also the actions and funds.

### **Project description and objectives**

The Equal Project “Inclusion” developed in the Province of Venice was conceived and implemented by 19 partners coming from the third sector (“Privato sociale”, cooperatives), USL, local governments (the Province Government and several City Councils), training centres, etc,

The problems identified were:

- Long term unemployment, and particularly referred to
- Disadvantaged categories of unemployed people having problems in entering the labour market.

The project has aimed at creating and experimenting a new model for the socio-professional inclusion of several groups of disadvantaged people, such as:

- Immigrants;
- School and education drop-outs;
- Drug addicts;
- People with judicial problems;
- Workers excluded from production cycles (over 40).

### **Objectives delivered and actions taken**

The objectives identified were:

- to promote the empowerment of these categories and stimulate their participation to an active and more qualified job-hunting;
- to promote the empowerment of the welfare services network involved;
- creating the model mentioned above;
- experimenting this new pattern;
- to promote the comparison of different approaches to long term unemployment;
- to create new models for the professional reinsertion;
- to avoid the “fragmentation”, widespread in the concerned area, of the specific actions, working on the social and professional reinsertion;

These objectives were meant to be achieved using several means:

- Collecting data form particularly shaped for the target chosen;
- Analysis of the regional incentives to employment and professional re-insertion for these disadvantaged people (incentives to employment for those categories of people and for companies);
- the creation of five Agencies of Social Negotiation (Agenzie di Negoziazione Sociale), each for every target category of disadvantaged persons, and composed of different operators belonging to the different local bodies, such as the Province,

- A.USSL (the local Health Dept.), Venice City Council, Social Cooperation, the Women's Italian Centre for employment ("Centro Italiano Femminile), etc;
- the introduction of innovative professional profiles such as the case manager, the mentor, the job coacher;
- the introduction of new instruments such as the internship, the "just in time" education, the "dual" education, the counselling, the competence statement, etc.

### **Results, evaluation and obstacles**

We can list the project achievements as follow:

- people socially "at the margins" and with a low cultural profile could finally access training courses and start actively job hunting;
- increase of the knowledge and awareness about the employment policies and services provided to the labour market in the Province of Venice;
- increase of the operators' competences about the target group's needs evaluation and subsequently the creation of individually shaped projects with different welfare services involved;
- an interdisciplinary method used in analysing the problems about a particular single case;
- increase of the operators' knowledge and awareness about the different working environments;
- discussion and dialogue about the "disadvantaged categories" bringing a more open attitude prejudice-free.

The Agency over 40, where I have been working, needed a long time in order to define the target type of person which could participate to the project and use the advantages provided.

Additionally the individual micro-project for job-hunting and the agency activities are a domain of new mediation where the group, the individuals and the services can build up relations and acknowledgements which are not just about employment: users have to develop "trust" towards the project/service. It is then a work in progress and a research where the agency becomes a reference experimenting new orienting, sustaining and accompanying methods, helped by the new profile of the "job coacher", the one who is next to the person assisting him in the steps of his job hunting: observing his behaviours during the job interviews and helping him with specific feed-backs.

The project has met several problems, mainly linked to an excess of bureaucracy which has slowed down all the activities and made more difficult the relation with the target groups: the time necessary to provide the service and the payment of the activity carried out to the person involved were too long, and considering the disadvantage of the person this participation to the project was not appealing in the end. Additionally the operators met a few problems in the communication process, due to the lack of a common vocabulary, and the different working methods.

And several were the prejudices about the target group either on a social level and on a professional and entrepreneurial level. The target persons on the other hand tend to think that this kind of projects have to provide a secure job shaped on their needs.



### **Resources (financial and human)**

The financial resources used for the whole project have been 1.624.000 EUR coming from the ESF funds which are distributed through the Regional Government. In my agency, one of the five involved in the Province of Venice, we were 3 people employed and for the 10 selected participants was available a budget of 35000 EUR, 3500 each.

### **Lessons learned**

The main lessons learnt from this experience are the following:

- the added value gained by working in a network
- **the trust of targeted people are fundamental for the project to be successful**
- the agency operators and the beneficiaries of the project share necessarily the same questions, even from different perspectives, on “which work” and “which kind of inclusion”: their interaction and a positive feedback are necessary to develop the project.

## Haydn Rees



### PROFESSIONAL PROFILE

<b>Current Work</b>	European Officer for Northamptonshire County Council located in the Economic Development Team.
<b>Area</b>	Northamptonshire, UK
<b>Education and Professional Training</b>	BA Hons Politics/Economic History; experience of developing international projects, experience of the European Commission environment from his secondment to the East Midlands European Office
<b>Professional areas of interest</b>	Interested in employment projects, the cultural economy and the impacts of EU enlargement.
<b>Areas of Expertise</b>	Employment strategy; European affairs

### PROJECT PROFILE

<b>Participant</b>	<a href="#">Haydn Rees</a>
<b>Area</b>	Northamptonshire, UK
<b>Project</b>	The Northamptonshire Integrated Local Employment Strategy
<b>Theme</b>	<b>Employment strategy (in this article: esp. about women)</b>

### Socio-economic context

The County of Northamptonshire covers a wide area with large rural areas mixed with urban areas. The population is about 625,000, and two thirds live in the major towns of Northampton, Wellingborough, Kettering, Corby, Daventry, Rushden, Towcester and Brackley, and the other one third live in more rural village settings. Northamptonshire is strategically located at the 'crossroads of England' easily accessible between major cities of Birmingham and London and Oxford and Cambridge.

Northamptonshire's proximity to the South East is one of the main drivers for economic change. We have one of the fastest growth rates and one of the lowest unemployment rates in the country. Recent government initiatives have earmarked our county as a growth area for potential government support, and the county council is engaged in levering in resources through regional partnerships and developments. This growth means that we are at key stage of regeneration decision making. However, these factors mask the economic and social

weaknesses which create barriers for realising some of the potentials described above and impacts most on disadvantaged and vulnerable groups:

- low overall levels of skills and productivity
- decline of traditional labour intensive industries such as boot and shoe manufacturing
- need to raise educational and social standards of young people
- recent problems in agricultural and rural communities
- emerging communities, particularly growth in migrant communities

### **Project description and objectives**

The Northamptonshire Integrated Local Employment Strategy ([NILES](#))<sup>4</sup> was launched in December 2004, funded by the European Union's Article 6 Innovative Measures fund. European Social Fund (ESF) Article 6 funds have been earmarked to support the delivery of local employment action plans under the European Employment Strategy. The Article 6 regulation encourages projects to pave the way for experimentation with innovative ideas and pilot projects, which could subsequently be incorporated into projects. This will therefore be an important key component of the NILES strategy development process.

In articulating a local commitment to employment, the following preparatory measures are considered important:

- To pilot the development of local action plans for employment promoted by local authorities
- To improve capacity building, monitoring, evaluation and benchmarking.
- To promote trans-national cooperation and the dissemination of good practice.

The EU requires the Local Employment Strategy to cover not only **employment**, but also **gender equality, social inclusion**, economic development, innovation and the information society.

- Taking the European Employment Strategy as its guidance, NILES identified actions relating to:
- labour supply and economic activity
- human capital and skills including for women
- enterprise and job creation

Northamptonshire is an area undergoing changes. Its population is on the rise and the area is expected to become highly urbanised.

In terms of female participation in the labour market, it emerged from research that we were above UK targets.

### **Economic activity rate females of working age 2002**

<sup>4</sup>To view the project report: <http://www.northamptonshire.gov.uk/NR/rdonlyres/6425991A-C08A-4C6D-B0A8-532795ED1089/0/NILESREPORT.pdf> or <http://www.northamptonshire.gov.uk/Democracy/European/NILES.htm>

Area	%
Great Britain	72.6
East Midlands	73.7
Leicestershire	79.9
Northamptonshire	77.7
Milton Keynes	76.5
Bedfordshire	78.8
Cambridgeshire	77.5
Warwickshire	77.8

However, analysing results we discovered that women, were under-employed: either they worked only part time or worked only in low-skill jobs.<sup>5</sup>

We consulted other districts, learning centres, the chamber of commerce. Our idea was to tackle the issue of women' skills and do research in order to make strategic recommendations.

A study that was done earlier showed that women were happy about this situation. A lot of low-skill single women, women on income support, used employment agencies to do low-skill temporary work. This employment pattern did not promote improving their skills. In areas of deprivation, this pattern does not only apply to women, it also applies to men. These are minority communities who think that skills are not needed because the employment rate is low in the region, anyway.

Our in-depth study showed that:

- Women were not informed about the ways in which they could acquire skills;
- They also lacked role model of women entrepreneurship;
- We also wanted to put forward the fact that women possess time management skills gained through child raising, house management. We decided that these skills should be tapped in.

- **Lack of information about training courses available**
- **Lack of skills and poor awareness about own skills**
- **Need to develop role models**
- **Lack of women in senior management positions**

The objectives of our employment strategy were to tackle these issues and:

<sup>5</sup> The complete report "Women in the Northamptonshire Labour Market" can be consulted via the following link: [http://www.northamptonshire.gov.uk/NR/rdonlyres/51C86BAE-0366-4F95-ACD9-5932038AEC98/0/FinalReportWomen\\_2.pdf](http://www.northamptonshire.gov.uk/NR/rdonlyres/51C86BAE-0366-4F95-ACD9-5932038AEC98/0/FinalReportWomen_2.pdf)

- Increase female representation at higher levels of decision making
- Increase the number of women in employment
- Increase the quality of female employment by training (improve information, about training courses, improve access to training by improving mobility esp. in rural areas), encouraging them to set up businesses, improving child care facilities to allow women to invest in a career.
- The issue of improving female average earnings was directly slinked to that of better skills, better salaries, and greater time availabilities.

Actions to reach these objectives were identified:

- We needed to do an audit of available training. If courses were available, then question was just about information. But if courses were not available or if courses were given at the wrong time of day, then it would be a question or reorientation and restructuring training services.
- Developing entrepreneurship can be done through network projects, peer support, mentoring..
- Increasing very basing skills such as filling an application, passing job interviews, increase confidence (especially that of women who had been out of the workforce for some time), making women aware of their skill, empower them through self confidence building.

### **Results, evaluation and obstacles**

We still need to implement an evaluation strategy. Evaluation, I think, in our project is about getting support from our peers and partners in the project's steering group meeting (ie. chamber of commerce, university, employment agencies, learning council etc.). We did not publish our strategy before the steering group approved it.

For me, the best evaluation in this kind of project is peer evaluation.

Concerning obstacles met: we had to persevere in communicating with the European Commission when we wanted to make changes to our project in order them.

### **Lessons learned**

Firstly, I want to say that I am happy to share my experience on how to work with the European Commission.

I learn that you need to consult widely, to ensure that you are not duplicating work, and to make sure that all the sides work together. Working together assures that your recommendations are better accepted and supported.

**>> Importance of networking and consulting**

It is easy to look at targets and tick boxes. But equality is a process, not just a target. You need to reassess what is the new challenge each time you reach a target.

**>> Equality is a process. It is not just about reaching a target**

The biggest obstacle facing women in attaining equality is attitude: their own self esteem as well as the attitude of employers towards them. Some women are not able to work full time. But this is no reason not to gain better skills. Employers have the same negative attitude. We must combat this.

**>> Women role models are needed also for employers**

If someone says we have a pocket of isolation: check how and why that is.

**>> Dig under the surface and keep checking the facts that come up**

The idea is to have the whole work force evolving, new comers must take low skill jobs but no worker should remain stuck in a low skill position.

Skilling people is great but you need people for basic jobs and if you look at Northampton's demographic statistics, we will need and we should have immigration: new women and new men moving into our area. People should evolve professionally to make place for new comers

Be flexible however difficult it is with the rigidities of European Commission projects. We were superseded by events and some changes in the projects had to be done: when that happens, one needs to be flexible so that the project's actions remain relevant.

**Keep going, do not stop at targets >> progressing is good**

## Ilaria Conti

### PROFESSIONAL PROFILE

<b>Current Work</b>	Coordinator of the Community Development Unit of the Local Development Agency “The Gate”
<b>Area</b>	Porta Palazzo, Torino (IT)
<b>Education and Professional Training</b>	Two years Master Degree in Organisational and Development Psychology Two years Master in Active Training Methods Training in Conflict Resolution (currently in the process of taking a Degree in Psychology)
<b>Professional areas of interest</b>	Community Psychology
<b>Areas of Expertise</b>	Participation and Empowerment process, Workgroup facilitation, Action Research, Social Net Working

### PROJECT PROFILE

<b>Participant</b>	Ilaria Conti, Association “The Gate”
<b>Area</b>	Porta Palazzo, Torino (IT)
<b>Project</b>	Visibaloon
<b>Theme</b>	<b>Female Participation and empowerment</b>

### Socio-economic context

The action has been carried out in the Porta Palazzo’s urban context, area which is next to the historic centre, and characterized by the presence of immigrants, during the 60-70 coming from the south of Italy (and backbone of the steel industry in Torino) and nowadays coming from third world countries; the people coming from outside the EU reach here the rate of 19,2% of the whole population, versus the 2% of the average in the rest of the city.

The immigrants’ population is mainly composed by Moroccons, then by Romanians and Chinese, and thirdly immigrants from Sub-saharian Africa. This sector of the population, traditionally employed in the industry, has now set up also a network of small businesses, shops, trades, which are very common here in this area. Among them we find Islamic Butchers, Chinese bazaars where the merchandise is sold very cheap.

Heart of the local economy and also of the community life is the Porta Palazzo’s market, composed by a very extended outdoors area, and four indoors blocks: the dealers concerned

are more or less a thousand, 40000 customers every day, with a peak on Saturdays of 100000 customers, 15 tons of rubbish produced every week.

The neighbourhood is affected by crime, linked especially to the drug market, managed especially by immigrants. This social wound creates tensions with the area inhabitants.

The other pole of tension is integration, due to lack of trust among the Italian population on one side, but also due to the lack of a recognized leadership on the immigrants' side; their communities are not very structured and are often led by leaderships very little authoritative and broken by internal fights.

From the urban and socio-economic point of view the area is very heterogeneous, old and decent buildings mix up often with very poor, dirty and deteriorated. Next to the market there is the Baloon, little second hand market with very old tradition from the XVIII century, taking place on Saturdays in the Borgo Dora's area. Till 2001 the legal frame of the market dealers was ruled by art. 121 of TULPS, which ruled a few street professions like rag traders; they were allowed to work with a special permission delivered by the council. After a while the TULPS was repealed by the government, causing a lot of legislative inconvenience and confusion, which left 250 street with no working permission. Mainly belonging to very weak categories (three rom families, drug users or former drug users).



In the beginning the Council pressured them to apply for the regular selling permission, then it gave up voting a decision in 2003 which delivered these non professional traders the status of free dealers in order to save the history and tradition of the neighbourhood, recognized as a common patrimony of the community.

### **Project description and objectives**

#### **Issues to be addressed**

At first the problems which were identified concerned:

- the lack of control, shared and recognized rules in the market area, which caused a lot of conflicts, insecurity affecting also the dealers as they were exposed to the law of the jungle, where the stronger is the most powerful;
- the uncertain legal identity of people who used to be traditional dealers and who became all of a sudden “illegal”;



- the residents' frustrations (noise and night inconvenience due to the to the fact that the dealers were stopping by the market, in front of houses, from Friday night in order to secure their space).

The identified risks concerned the rejection of the dealers, with very negative consequences on the waste of traditions of the area and degeneration of the conflicts.

The action has been conceived in order to promote the empowerment of these weak categories and stimulate their participation to the decision making process: they were supposed to become in this way a negotiating interlocutor for the institutional power, and the public administration.

In the beginning (end of December 2000) we have worked on the anthropologic observation in order to map the relationship between the actors working in the market, then we proceed in confronting and discussing the different issues.

This interaction has resulted in creating an association, Visibaloon, representing the dealers' interests, and which has immediately started acting as the public interlocutor in order to negotiate with the Council the conditions the market had to move to another area (may 2002) and the new position of dealers with no permission in a new area. The public administration has then charged the association of the management and control of this market area in exchange of a financial contribution (from November 2003).

#### Objectives delivered and actions taken

The objectives identified were:

- to increase the sense of responsibility of all actors concerned, and notably the street dealers, expected to be implied in all decisions making and managing processes, and the public administrators, expected to contaminate with a different sensitivity and to get a new consciousness about the ruling process;
- to imply in a participative process the street traders and to get to a new legal frame ruling the selling activity in an outdoors market;
- to reduce social conflicts, uncertainty, inconvenience and fears in the area;

These objectives have been achieved using several means:

- through a participated observation;
- through the organization of meetings and implying the various actors concerned;
- by creating an association which was able to be the interface and the interlocutor with the public institutions: from an unshaped group of subjects at the margins it originated a structured leadership and an association recognized by the other traders and by residents: this association then took a great direct responsibility in the dialogue and interaction with the administrators and in front of the community;
- by drafting the regulation on the market area, which was negotiated and concerted with administrators, traders with legal permission and traders with no permission. The negotiating process which brought to this regulation has lasted six months time, with meetings, talks, negotiations, and now it should be included in a Council decision;

- through self management and control by the street dealers over their area: now all the entrances to this section are controlled and each dealer is identified with a badge.

“The Gate” works as an agency for local development and promotes the responsibility of the actors concerned accompanying the process and creating a new collective and public subject, and not replacing it.

### **Resources (financial and human)**

The project has been funded by the budget of the association “The Gate”, but it was not covered by a fund “ad hoc”, as the action has been carried out within the social accompanying measure set up by the Gate unit managed by two people working 20 hours a week in total (10 each) in the period of time 2000-2002, while they have been working half of that time in the next period (2002-2004).

To the two operators from “The gate” it has to be added some volunteer expert in training and creating the association: the association itself is composed by volunteers.

The local government funds the clerical work corresponding to 25 weekly hours and six operators (12 hours each) for managing the market. In exchange the Council gets the income from the use of the public soil, paid by the dealers (prior to that they did not get this money) and they have less expenses for managing the traffic and solve the previous inconvenience.

### **Results, evaluation and obstacles**

Formal and structured evaluations haven’t been done, nor a systematic results collection. “The Gate” has just discussed and analyzed in internal meetings the development of this action, and monitored it progressively, collecting data when needed and with the contribution of the Council welfare services; its evaluation cannot then be separated from the work on the field.

In order to have a formal and structured evaluation we would need resources which were not available.

We can assume as quantitative indicators the number of the persons concerned by the project, or those who participated to the meetings, while several are the possible qualitative indicator:

- the people’s desire to get a leading role and to participate to the decision making process;
- the increase of solidarity and mutual help among traders;
- the promotion of “the Gate” in its role as a visible reference in the entire process.

### **Lessons learned**

The lessons to learn from an experience of such a social action based on the dialogue and interaction/cooperation with several social actors are many, among them the most important are:

- **Sequentiality** of the project: it is a progressive process, and each stage is necessary and cannot be skipped if you want to act deeply on the ground and produce real changes lasting over the time;
- need of the **commitment/support** given **by public institutions**: the participation of the public sector is fundamental as it legitimates the process and it is contaminated itself in this process, in a very creative feed-back. The public administrators have to be involved as political decision-makers but also providing technical experts.
- you have to set up the basis of a solution to a problem taking it **from the problem and the concrete situation**; this collective and mutual work creates solidarity and mutual trust, which become the factors of complexity reduction: through trust and social link created between social and public actors who previously didn't know one another, you can deal with complex situations.

## Isabel Moya



### PROFESSIONAL PROFILE

<b>Current Work</b>	<b>Director of the Women Institute</b> <sup>6</sup>
<b>Area</b>	Toledo, Castilla-La Mancha, Spain
<b>Education and Professional Training</b>	Communication, management and policies mostly women and women equality
<b>Professional areas of interest</b>	Participation and political leadership, conciliation between labour and family life; implementing and coordinating appropriate policies on gender equality
<b>Areas of Expertise</b>	Implementing and coordination gender equality policies

### PROJECT PROFILE

<b>Participant</b>	<a href="#">Isabel Moya</a>
<b>Area</b>	Toledo, Castilla-La Mancha, Spain
<b>Project</b>	Women Institute
<b>Theme</b>	<b><a href="#">Emancipation policies for women</a></b>

### Socio-economic context

Castilla-La Mancha is one of the least populated region in Spain, with a surface of 80000 squared Km and just 1800000 inhabitants: 908125, a bit more than half of them, are women, while 20% of the population is older than 65, and 24% is composed of women older than 65. This aging process of the population is due to migration during the last century which produced a massive depopulating dynamic, but in the last 10 years we can see a trend reversal due to an immigration which has corrected the previous migration movements.

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<sup>6</sup> Articles in Spanish cover the Women Institute and Isabel Moya's involvement and support for gender equality : [www.lacerca.com/2005/Local/pagina\(20-01-05\)-2.htm](http://www.lacerca.com/2005/Local/pagina(20-01-05)-2.htm) as well as [http://www.jccm.es/educacion/educar/num\\_21/entrevista.htm](http://www.jccm.es/educacion/educar/num_21/entrevista.htm), or [http://www.jccm.es/revista/158/articulos158/entrevista\\_octubre.htm](http://www.jccm.es/revista/158/articulos158/entrevista_octubre.htm) and [http://www.lacerca.com/Regional%202003/pagina\(16-09-03\)-1.htm](http://www.lacerca.com/Regional%202003/pagina(16-09-03)-1.htm).

Castilla-La Mancha is composed of 919 municipalities, but nearly all of them live in very small villages, just 59 of them have more than 5000 inhabitants. As many as 800 municipalities are less populated than 3000 inhabitants, and 9,8% of the population live in villages with less than 1000 persons. 4 persons out of 10 live in towns with less than 5000 inhabitants. So the population is very spread out in little villages in the middle of a very extended area (this is the third most extended region in Spain).

The borders of this region are the Autonomous Community of Madrid, in the north, Andalusia in the south, and Extremadura and Portugal in the east side.

Historically, Castilla was a region forgotten and left behind by governments and kings, but since democracy and the entry in the E.U. it has known an incredible development, which in 25 years has completely changed its look and its deeper social and economic structure. From being mainly based on agriculture, its economy has become now service-oriented, even though still 10% of the active population is employed in agriculture.

A heritage from the past is the heavy unemployment rate affecting women three times more than men: in the fourth term of 2004 the males' unemployment rate was 5,66% on the active population, versus the 16,90 of the women's one; the rate of the males' employment gets up to 66,53%, while the women's is stuck at 36,38%. But this is just a synchronic picture, which does not register a dynamic movement, changes and improvements; we can say that women are integrating in the professional life more and more in the region: in four years (2001-2004) the women's employment rate had an increase of 5,5%, and in 2004 3 new jobs created out of 4 were taken by women. This is due to the new positive discrimination policies carried out by the regional government, and the new attention developed since the 90's to the issue of a higher women's participation.

### **Project description and objectives**

#### **Key issues/problems to be addressed**

A complex society has always been organized giving different roles to persons. The problem is when a role turns into a stereotype, which sticks individuals to a fixed position, in this case a professional status, or a lack of one, just on a sexual basis. Within this frame, which can easily call "sexist", men are the ones working outside, and having the economic power, and women stay at home looking after the house and the children. We can say that the labour market in Castilla-La Mancha is still very sexist, condemning women mostly to stay home and not develop in a professional dimension.

Till the 90's the rate of women's employment was very low, even though women were involved in the family's economic activities, mostly linked to agriculture.

The Women Institute originates in this context: it is a body created in 2002; before then it was called General Directorate for Women (Dirección General de la Mujer), born at the end of the 80's in order to promote women's equality and fight any discrimination and violence against women. It is mostly in the 90's that a new political goodwill becomes dominant and the women's integration in society and in the labour market becomes a real objective of the Regional Government.

At an educational level we reached equality, and at a university level 54% of students are now women. In the professional environment the rate of women's employment stays low: while the unemployment rate for men (around 5%) is much lower than the national average (around 9%), for women it is much higher than the national average (still around 17%).

On the other hand there has been a high increase of the women's social and political participation: we have nowadays as many as 1200 women associations spread out across the whole territory of Castilla- La Mancha. Women have been a factor of a deep social transformation of the region.

### Objectives delivered and actions taken

In spite of the increased social participation of women to the social and political development in Castilla, the priority of an action oriented by the equality of opportunity value is still the employment and educational issue, and in addition any domain which is affected by a gender inequality.

The objectives of the Women Institute can be summed up this way:

- To increase the chances for women to find a job (principle of equality of chances for both men and women);
- To reduce the women's unemployment rate
- To promote a women's entrepreneurial attitude;
- To conciliate family and professional life for women;

These objectives are meant to be achieved using several means:

- Training and specializing courses;
- Actions of sustain;
- Technical Services for Sustain, Advise and Assistance for creating and support women's businesses.

The network of Services is spreading out across the region reaching the smallest villages: in each of them we can find now a Women Centre, where 4 or 5 women, professional experts in different domains (legal, psychological support, advise on working and social dynamization), provide women their free assistance, especially concerning gender harassment, abuse and violence, but more generally concerning any equality issues. As many as 73 centres are already operational (5 of them have been created in 2005). These centres are a co-partnership between the Women Institute and the local governments of the municipalities, and often the work together with education centres.

Concerning the institutional arrangements of our action:

- the planning phase lies in the frame of the IV Plan for Equality of Opportunities for the period 2004-2008, adopted by the Government and concerted together with the third sector (associations working in the field of equality issues) ;
- the implementation phase is carried out through 8 Working Groups:
  - Work
  - Violence
  - Media and Communication

- Education
- Increase and Extension of Equality
- Power
- Methodology
- Quality of Life

### **Results, evaluation and obstacles**

All this activity promoted by the Regional Government of Castilla La Mancha in favour of equality and against any social and cultural discrimination based on gender has been supported on a legal level by the first law against violence voted in Spain, which has been an example for the others Regions (Comunidades).

Nevertheless these actions encountered some social obstacles, especially coming from the media, which have normally different priorities than the change of social roles and stereotypes. The transformation that has to be carried out is so deep as it needs many efforts to change the mentality of workers and also employers, in whose mind prejudice is hard to be eliminated. Equality is now more a legal fact than a real fact, as cultural changes are always happening on a long term basis.

### **Resources (financial and human)**

The budget available for the Women Institute comes from the Regional Government of Castilla-La Mancha: in 1999 it was 6 million EUR, while in 2005 it is 20 million EUR, with an increase in six years of about 205%. This highlights the priority given by the Government to the gender equality issues, as the Institute is directly linked to the Presidency of the Government, even though it is an autonomous body.

Its central headquarter is located in Toledo, and employs 40 persons, while in each of the five provinces of the region, there are detached 5 persons more; in addition to that the Women Centres spread out in the entire regional area there are 400 employees, and 100 employees in the 18 Reception Houses for Women Victims of Violence, which offer 317 beds for women and minors, employ 100 psychologists, legal consultants and women educators.

## **Lessons learned**

The lessons we can learn from the experience of our action are several: **gender equality is still a priority and has to be interiorized.** It is still urgent to push and support policies against discrimination

It is necessary to strongly support laws but at the same time to implement in a very efficient way policies through **concrete programmes**

We need a more punctual strategy to implement changes in the **general consciousness.**

The whole society has to be involved, and particularly the **media**, whose role is very important and in the past not always have been working towards equality.





**PROFESSIONAL PROFILE**

<b>Current Work</b>	<p>Head of curriculum for the Community &amp; Play Service To promote high quality services to the whole community of Birmingham through community development, community work and play provision. To develop and implement frameworks and indicators for monitoring the quality and quantity of community and play services.</p>
<b>Past Work</b>	<p>I was in my last job for five years working as a Youth Team Project Worker at Redditch Borough Council. I have sole responsibility for the Reachout Project, which works to address issues affecting ethnic minority young people in Redditch. Reachout supports an Asian Girls group, an Asian Boys group and an African Caribbean Group, as this project was the first of its kind in the town, I had the responsibility of devising its structure and how the project would work in response to the needs of the young people. My duties were extended to incorporate the management of a Young Women's project and a Single Parent Project.</p>
<b>Education and Professional Training</b>	<p>Between 1993 and 1996 I gained a BPhil in Community and Youth studies. I gained an A grade for my research dissertation which looked at how students at Westhill College were equipped to challenge issues of racism while working in their chosen field. I complete an MA this year (2005) in Applied Community Studies at the University of Birmingham Westhill. Modules of study include social Inclusion, life long learning, action research and learning through personal development groups.</p>
<b>Professional areas of interest</b>	<p>How open dialogue is important when organisations have to implement legislation into policies and the practices of staff; exploring if addressing issues of race, gender, disability etc. in isolation, helps to maintain divisions.</p>
<b>Areas of Expertise</b>	<p>I have been a freelance tutor since 1992, tutoring on issues relating to the Youth, Community and Play profession. Central to my tutoring sessions are issues of oppression and inequality which need to be explored sensitively whilst bearing in mind peoples differing levels of awareness. I have devised various courses on race and identity, looking at how these issues effect personal &amp; professional working practice.</p>

## PROJECT PROFILE

<b>Participant</b>	<a href="#">Kemi Folarin</a>
<b>Area</b>	Handsworth, Birmingham, UK
<b>Project</b>	“Families in Focus” book-group
<b>Theme</b>	<b>Women empowerment through family/community interaction</b>

### Socio-economic context

The area where the project is set is called Handsworth. It is an inner city area, in Birmingham, inhabited mostly by ethnic minorities from African or Afro-Caribbean descent. Normally “areas of high deprivation” with quite a high crime rate. In Birmingham, inner city areas are normally more deprived than suburbs. The latter are higher class.

In this area also there are quite a number of single parents as well and a lot of young people who do not go to further education after they finish year thirteen. I have however chosen to stay in this area, with my children as well.

### Project description and objectives

I am personally involved in the municipality’s social work and I wanted to do something outside the constraints the municipality sets on projects such as the need to focus on such categories as youth, aged people, gender. I wanted to focus on families in a holistic sense.

The book group idea came up at a party. One young man proposed to set up such a group and asked if I could coordinate it. I agreed.

**The book group was set up originally by five voluntary women, like myself. We wanted to devise a neighbourhood project, we applied for funding for the project to materialize (see below) and called the book-group “Families in Focus”.**

The objectives of “Families in Focus” are:

- Sharing experience: I wanted to discuss moral issues with children. And discuss gender issues too, with my girls and my boy. Sharing experience with the support of books, with the family and the community
- Read and encouraging young people to read. I have teenage daughters who haven’t read since they were ten. One of the problems I wanted to address is the lack of will to read when reading is an asset for further education.
- I also wanted to generate a change in pass-time, make something more constructive with our social time than television and improve that together as a group. Improve the

quality of our social exchange. I had an interest in knowledge sharing in an informal fashion, family and community learning being an efficient way. I really think we can discuss moral issues and learn better collectively than from television.

Our group is informal (like some of the young people requested), there are no restricting rules. We meet on a monthly base, with friends and kids, at my place. What pleases me is that everyone is reading. There are no older men in the group, the older one is twenty-five. The older members are all women. Presently, the group is made of thirteen people but more people read the book than just our group because kids for example, talk friends into reading too.

Originally, we met up in my house, adults separated from the children. But young people, aged thirteen up, didn't want to leave the room, they stayed in.

My children were talking about books they'd read to older people, aged 21 and above. My children wanted to start reading books!!?? I was startled.

### **Results, evaluation and obstacles**

The idea was that each time, we'd list three books and each one of us would read one from the list. The book proposed during the first gathering was "The coldest winter ever" by some hip-hop artist, Sister Souldjer. Initially I was not very interested in reading that book.

The first striking impact on my family is that for one week, the house was blessed with quietness, no noise... and my children telling me that I wouldn't approve of the book. I was a little worried, but I thought I wanted to debate on it anyway, whatever it was.

We all decided that we'd wait for the group to discuss. When the debate occurred, every one managed to put what they had read into perspective. It worked really well.

There has been no formal evaluation of the project other than our own appreciation and enjoyment. The fact that the group kept meeting, that it involved a mix of people, across ages and gender, was a challenge and an indicator of success.

### **Resources (financial and human)**

From a financial point of view, we are now putting in an application to buy the books on our lists and we'd like to buy them only from the local book-store so that we can support the local community. Then it will be a community project. We could have £2000. Then we would also want to see what we will do with our books once we have read them, maybe we could give them to our local library. Actually some of us got our books from the local library too. I knew about this possibility for funding because I work at the Council, but this application is really easy for everyone to fill up!

As for human resources, we were five founding members for a group that has grown to about thirty people, mostly from the neighbourhood.

Other resources are my front room.

## **Lessons learned**

The dynamics of the group shows gender issues already.

The book proposed during the first gathering was “The coldest winter ever” by some hip-hop artist, Sister Souldjer and the second book-group meeting proposed was another hip hop book (by) Monster Codey. These two books were put forward by young men. My daughter who read it said the book was too aggressive and she did not want to pursue reading. It was about American gangs. I thought maybe boys like more violence. We wondered, my daughter and I, if there might be a gender issue there.

### **> Men tend to be more vocal**

I read in a survey that war books and military books are targeted specifically at men for 80% of such book readers are male. Also, men want to move more non-fiction and fiction much less. On the other hand, the publicizing industry targets romances and thrillers at women. So, as a group, we should be mindful of the books we chose. Especially because young male are more vocal and louder. Young women are less vocal. All have curiosity, but men have less patience.

### **> The choice of books itself is often gender linked**

If we don't engage everyone in the discussion and the choice of books, we might lose readers, either men who don't want fiction or women who don't want violence.

The question is really to keep people involved, so that we can entertain the discussion, all together. Before we chose a book, we take proposals and discuss the proposed books: it ought to be a democratic process. This itself trains negotiating skills and helps participants in developing communication skills. What I like is that people of all age, from age fourteen to fifty and from varied social backgrounds, some young people are unemployed and live at their parents for example; although, we all live in the same geographical area.

### **> The question is to keep everyone involved, always, women and men**

As for the group, it is about everybody being involved and everyone getting heard. We all do make an effort to get everyone involved, even the quieter young girls. Once, for example, my daughter wanted to speak up and could not be heard through the crowd. My sister, who is not in “Families in Focus” made a way for my daughter to speak up.

Coming back to the issue of gender, one of the books chosen was about a woman making all the wrong choices. We had a group discussion, women shared their experience and they were blaming men for treating women as sex objects. It is not only about young women but also about how men treat women. I hope that the group remains mixed. We need to get the right book that everyone is interested in and maintain the balance right.

### **> Gender issues are not only about women, but also about men**

I think that older people read more. I finished my Masters degree in June last year so until there most of my reading was academic, related to gender and race, I couldn't wait until I finished.

Age and gender matter on how confident people are with speaking up: young girls are quieter, they tend not to speak up in front of males.

**> Age and gender matter on how confident people are**

Finally, I think that shared learning is an extremely enjoyable process and I encourage everyone to engage in it.

## Luis Diaz Cacho



### PROFESSIONAL PROFILE

<b>Current Work</b>	Director of the Public Employment Office for the region of Castilla la Mancha
<b>Area</b>	Toledo, Castilla-La Mancha, Spain
<b>Education and Professional Training</b>	BA in Philology; Master in Rural Development. Area coordinator for economic development in the district of Solana
<b>Professional areas of interest</b>	Coordinating Local Area Development for the City Council of Solana, Manager of the Mancomunidad (Associations of Municipalities) of La Mancha, President of the Association of Professionals for the Local Development and the Economic Promotion of Castilla la Mancha (APRODEL), President of the National Federation of Local Development Professionals (FEPRODEL)
<b>Areas of Expertise</b>	Strategic planning, programme management, human resources management.

### PROJECT PROFILE

<b>Participant</b>	<a href="#">Luis Diaz Cacho</a>
<b>Area</b>	Toledo, Castilla-La Mancha, Spain
<b>Project</b>	Local Employment Strategies <sup>7</sup>
<b>Theme</b>	<b>Participation of women in the labour market</b>

### Socio-economic context

Castilla-La Mancha is one of the least populated regions in Spain, with a surface of 80000 squared Km and just 1800000 inhabitants: it is composed of 919 municipalities, but just 59 of them have more than 5000 inhabitants. So the population is very spread out in little villages in the middle of a very extended area. Its borders are the Autonomous Community of Madrid on the north, Andalusia on the south, Extremadura and Portugal on the west side, and Valencia on the east.

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<sup>7</sup> More on this theme can be viewed through the Equal project Imumel following the links :  
<http://www.equalvoices.org/spain> or  
[http://www.equalvoices.org/spain/downloads/Flyer\\_IMUMEL\\_final\\_1.doc](http://www.equalvoices.org/spain/downloads/Flyer_IMUMEL_final_1.doc) or  
<http://www.sepecam.jccm.es/equal/imumel.php>.

Historically, Castilla was a region forgotten and left behind by governments and kings, but since democracy and the entry in the E.U. it has known an incredible development, which in 25 years has completely changed its look and its deeper social and economic structure. From being mainly based on agriculture, its economy has become now service-oriented, even though still 10% of the active population is employed in agriculture.

A heritage from the past is the heavy unemployment rate affecting women three times more than men: in the fourth term of 2004 the males' unemployment rate was 5,66% on the active population, versus the 16,90% of the women's one; the rate of the males' employment gets up to 66,53%, while the women's is stuck at 39,08%. But this is just a synchronic picture, which does not register a dynamic movement, changes and improvements; we can say that women are integrating in the professional life more and more in the region: in four years (2001-2004) the women's employment rate had an increase of 5,5%, and in 2004 3 new jobs created out of 4 were taken by women. This is due to the new positive discrimination policies carried out by the regional government: thank to them an employer has an interest in employing a woman rather than a man.

## **Project description and objectives**

### Key issues/problems to be addressed

A complex society has always been organized giving different roles to persons. The problem is when a role turns into a stereotype, which sticks individuals to a fixed position, in this case a professional status, or a lack of one, just on a sexual basis. Within this frame, which can easily call "sexist", men are the ones working outside, and having the economic power, and women stay at home looking after the house and the children. We can say that the labour market in Castilla-La Mancha is still very sexist, condemning women mostly to stay at home and not develop in a professional dimension. Our political and administrative activity has the purpose to change this matter of fact characterized by a deep inequality towards a situation of equality in opportunities in the labour market for both men and women, giving women a chance to conciliate a professional life with a family life.

The situation is already fluid thank to the policies carried out in the last 20 years in the strategic frame of the E.U. always working together with the social agents and all the citizens of Castilla La Mancha.

The second key issue identified by the our activity, and linked in some way to the first one, is to make society more modern and efficient and increase the quality of life for citizens by changing deeply what is called the "employee", a complete lack of "entrepreneurial" attitude which pushes and sticks people into the employee's status securities, not trying to be more dynamic and creative.

Our mission is then to give the chance to unemployed people to find a good job, and keep it, and to help employers to find good qualified employees: in more general terms that means to improve the chances, and the performance, of employment for citizens in Castilla-La Mancha. This is a deep political objective, developed from the awareness that in this kind of society who is unemployed could lead in a process of social exclusion: so in a long term we tend to create the equal chances for employment for whoever is available to work.

### Objectives delivered and actions taken

The objectives of the Public Employment Service (Servicio Publico de Empleo) of the Regional Government of Castilla-La Mancha, can be summed up this way:

- To increase the chances for citizens to find a good job, in a better realization of the principle of equality of chances for both men and women;
- To give to employers the means to find skilled and qualified workers;
- To increase the entrepreneurial attitude among the most dynamic sectors of population and particularly among women, and give them the chances to come out and create actual employment and economic development;

These objectives were meant to be achieved using several means:

- With a general agreement between Trade Unions and the Castilla Association of Employers;
- With positive economic discrimination actions;
- With measures oriented to conciliate family and professional life for women;
- and Collecting data form and indicators particularly shaped for the target chosen;

Concerning the institutional arrangements:

- the planning phase lies in the frame of the Agreement for Employment signed by the government and the social parties for the period 2004-2007;
- the implementation phase is carried out through 30 concrete programs: each one of them is concerted and negotiated by unions and employers;
- the evaluation phase is done with the participation of the social and economic agents and in a concerted way ( by the Workers' Commissions, the Confederation of Employers of Castilla-La Mancha and public regional administration).

The participation of women in all our programmes is at least of the 50%.

### **Results, evaluation and obstacles**

The project was put into action in October 2004: in 2004, more than 53% of the beneficiaries of the actions of the Public Employment Service were women. In 2005 we claim to raise this rate up to 60%, with a positive discrimination approach which would aim at pushing the evolution of social stereotypes towards a better equality between men and women.

The main obstacle was a deep sexist culture in the labour market, either on the workers' side and also on the employers' side; another barrier on the way to equality of opportunities is the problems in conciliating a family life with a professional life in a context where women are still traditionally the ones supposed to carry out the domestic work.

The main reason of the success of our measures is the fact they are part of a greater strategic frame working on development and training and education on EU level: we receive important inputs from a European level to increase the rate of employment and better opportunities for women.

### **Resources (financial and human)**



The budget used by the Public Employment Service of the Regional Government of Castilla-La Mancha, is 185,2 million EUR: 15% of it comes from regional funds, 50% from funds distributed on a national level (EU and National State sources) and the remaining 35% are funds coming from an Operational Integrated Programme (co-financing of the Regional Government and EU).

The massive intervention of the EU level is due to the fact that Castilla-La Mancha is a region “Objective 1” covered by the EU Structural Funds.

The Public Employment Service employ 555 people in the whole Region, in the 5 provinces.

### **Lessons learned**

The lessons we can learn from the experience of our service are multiple:

- it is possible to operate radical and deep changes just if we **share good practice**
- **Act locally but think globally**: any kind of regional and local development must be thought strategically on a European and global context level
- We cannot understand a more and more integrated world and foresee a progress of this world unless we **deeply take into consideration the role played by immigrants and the value of solidarity** (note the particular geographic position of Spain, a natural bridge to the southern Mediterranean people: just 14 km separate Spain, the Europe’s tip, from Morocco, the Africa’s tip).

## Marco Finetti

### PROFESSIONAL PROFILE

<b>Current Work</b>	Social Educator for the Municipality of Torino
<b>Area</b>	Circoscrizione VII, Torino, Italy
<b>Education and Professional Training</b>	Social Educator, specialised with Youth
<b>Professional areas of interest</b>	Social inclusion of children and teenagers. I mainly organise activities and events which allow them to participate fully in society and to feel socially included.
<b>Areas of Expertise</b>	School and professional guidance for young people

### PROJECT PROFILE

<b>Participant</b>	<a href="#">Marco Finetti</a>
<b>Area</b>	Circoscrizione VII <sup>8</sup> , Torino, ITALY
<b>Project</b>	Youth Project ( Promoting area-based information to improve the employability of young people)
<b>Theme</b>	<b>Professional training and employment opportunities for disadvantaged youth</b>

### Socio-economic context

The area I work in, “Circoscrizione VII” is an area near Porta Palazzo, in the Torino city centre.

Porta Palazzo is an inner Torino suburb, characterized by high concentration of social exclusion and conflicts due to the cohabitation of different communities and cultures.

### Project description and objectives

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<sup>8</sup> For information in Italian about this area and other social services provides follow the link: <http://www.comune.torino.it/circ7/>

The Youth project that I will present, was born about 3 years ago in “Circoscrizione VII”, Torino.

Its aim is to promote access to information about territory opportunities in the field of training and employment for excluded or minority groups, including women.

With this in mind, a network was set up to promote, share and improve access to existing public services offered to the citizen in “Circoscrizione VII”.

A partnership was established between 10 different bodies; another partner is interested in joining the network, in the near future, a women association whom we linked up with thanks to the “Latent Potential” project, is interested in joining. There are another 10 organizations that are part of the working group that are not formally part of the partnership.

The partners come out different realities: public bodies, voluntary associations, parish groups, training agencies, ...

One of the most important aspects of the project is to share experience and knowledge coming out from different sectors and backgrounds.

At the operative level, the project work group is sub-divided into 3 categories: the first one is on the theme of “communication”: how to inform (websites, emails, newspapers, leaflets...) and how to reach people, especially those who are socially disadvantaged (because of gender, ethnic origin...).

The second theme is to map up an “area contract” with employers.

### **Results, evaluation and obstacles**

The project became formally recognized during public meetings and at city government level. That recognition was due to the particularly innovativeness and quality of the work undertaken in spreading information at territorial level.

Another important result is the continuous growth of the partnership, which started with 5 partners and is soon going to involve 20 partners.

The growing recognition of the importance of networking, particularly in social and employment related fields (especially when one tries to reach out to “socially excluded” groups) is another crucial factor. Once objectives and methodologies have been set, and once some key partners have joined in, networking can deliver outstanding results in dissemination information to those in need.

### **Obstacles**

Difficulties encountered are mainly connected to the fact that the partners may have different perceptions of social realities. This makes it sometimes difficult for them to agree on methodologies and contents. This may even lead to misunderstandings.

But on the other hand, the confrontation between different realities is an important value of the project.

### **Resources (financial and human)**

Human resources consist of at least one delegate per partner to work on general project administration up to a total of about 30 hours par year.

At financial level, the project has a budget of 1200 € par year. This is a small amount, but it has an important meaning: that of the project's public and official recognition by the city government.

### **Lessons learned**

Thanks to the contact with "The Gate", important contributions concerning the role of women have been added to the existing project.

The project has been easily integrated in the "Latent Potential" project, in order to give women a more effective access to job opportunities on the territory.

Moreover, a women association, which has been recently created thanks to the "Latent Potential" project, will join the project partnership soon.

## Martha Louis



### PROFESSIONAL PROFILE

<b>Current Work</b>	Policy Advisor for the District of Charlois
<b>Area</b>	District of Charlois, Rotterdam, the Netherlands
<b>Education and Professional Training</b>	Seventeen years experience in the local government in the fields listed below (professional areas of interest) esp. integration policies
<b>Professional areas of interest</b>	Social policy ; elderly policy ; emancipation policy ; social integration policy
<b>Areas of Expertise</b>	Integration Policy

### PROJECT PROFILE

<b>Participant</b>	<a href="#">Martha Louis</a>
<b>Area</b>	District of Charlois, Rotterdam, the Netherlands
<b>Project</b>	Integration Policy Strategy in the District
<b>Theme</b>	<b>Integration and emancipation policies for women and ethnic minorities</b>

### Socio-economic context

Charlois is a district within the municipality of Rotterdam. It is the home to 67000 inhabitants. The population is mixed, so are cultures. The percentage of inhabitants of ethnic minority background has raised from 38% to 49% between 1996 and 2002. In some parts of the districts, this proportion reaches 66%. The largest group is made up of people originating from Surinam (9,2%) and from Turkey (6,8%). The fastest growing community is the Antillean community (West Indies). The district is quite poor, which can be measured by how many people are on social benefits (about 6700 in 2002 or 10% of the population). 20% of people in Charlois are children 50% of whom are educated by their single mother.

### Project/Action description and objectives

I work in a political environment, for the Executive Committee of the District Council of Charlois. My policy fields are the elderly and social affairs. My field of work is emancipation.

It is not a separate policy area: the policy is inclusion, and the fight against exclusion. When people are excluded, they ought to be included. There is no separate policy to include women as such.

Also within the municipality itself, there is no positive discrimination towards employing women. The Executive Committee is made up entirely of men, There are 50/50 across gender distribution in management positions and in the strategy unit, 65% are women and 35% are men.

For more than two years now, positive discrimination as well as strategies targeting gender or origin have been taken out from the political agenda.

I am not working on specific projects directly but I allocate grants for projects developed in the district of Charlois. In line with the present policy, project grants do not and cannot target specifically gender linked inclusion projects. Projects must include everyone irrespective of gender or origin.

Some structures depending on structural funds do not suffer from these restrictions, for example the Women Centres Cleopatria who receives grants to sustain their structure and pay salaries. They have a stable yearly budget.

The general policy strategy is that everyone should be treated equally. On the one hand we say that men and women are equal and thus should be treated in the same way. On the other hand, we know that there are specific measures that work better for specific groups. This is the case with women, but also with other groups. Whatever the policy constraints, the main goal is to get everyone covered by the general inclusion policy.. so in fact, we have to take this detour...

The City of Rotterdam's Steering Group want to put emancipation back on the agenda.

<b>Emancipation</b>
The action of setting free from slavery; and hence, generally, from civil disabilities; the action of setting free socially or politically.

Many people in the Netherlands think that we have reached our targets when it comes to gender equality. If one looks at data about "Women in the labour market", we can see that women are still lagging behind in terms of employment and that there still is a gap in terms of emancipation. Here I would also want to add that what can be said about women emancipation can also be transposed in favour of other groups defined by ethnic origin.. We are not there yet! We must get the agenda moving.

Charlois' participation in the project Latent Potential did not occur because gender equality is a priority in terms of our emancipation policy. Support for projects on this issue is by no means supported by the District of Charlois and is not particularly popular. We had to persevere to join the project Latent Potential.

In my opinion, the starting point is to get emancipation (incl. female emancipation specifically) on the political agenda. Let us, again, take the case of the Latent Potential project. When I asked the District Council who wanted to participate in coordinating the project, no one expressed interest: women emancipation is not a priority.

The municipality does of course take actions that benefit women:

- Meeting points for women do exist and are supported by the municipality;
- There are programmes of activities for women, to take them out of their house;
- People on social benefits have access to a lot of training courses (one obstacle in participating to these training courses is that child care is not always well organised in parallel to the courses). There are also Dutch classes, communication classes (writing letters, applying for employment...) and other education courses;
- Through structural funding, the municipality is indirectly involved in community projects such as:
  - women centres like Cleopatria;
  - small business units;
- Volunteer work in elderly homes or elderly care in general;
- Municipal schools seek volunteers.

**Activating women, providing them with the opportunity for get out of their house, participate in the society through volunteer work is the beginning of emancipation, especially in the case of ethnic or migrant groups.**

Here in the Netherlands, and in Charlois as well of course, there is this reality of people being born Dutch, who have a Dutch nationality and who are still considered *allochtones* (a word that Dutch people use to refer to people who are not *autochtones*, and whose origin is not European Dutch) because they were born in Dutch territories outside Europe. A very common example is that of the Antilleans. We have to deal men and the emancipation of migrants. This is a political statement.

I think it is important to raise the political issue of emancipation and how to promote emancipation. Gender equality is not necessarily on the agenda at local level in EU countries. If the European Union wants to promote gender equality as such, strategies and reality at local level have to be addressed.

I want to put gender equality back on the agenda because “data” shows that there is still a low labour participation of women in the labour market; and that women are still being discriminated in terms of wages. At general managerial level it is obvious that women are totally under-represented or absent.

To get gender equality back on the agenda, we must endorse initiatives such as that of the City of Rotterdam. At district level, not much is happening and female emancipation remains this inseparable part of our inclusive policy.

**>> We have to address women and migrants’ emancipation.**

At present, there is only this status quo, nothing is changing, and nothing new is coming up. Integration is on the agenda, but no specific action is designed for women.

## **Results, evaluation and obstacles**

### **Results**

I want to see figures and facts that show me that women and ethnic minorities are effectively integrated, that they participate in the labour market, in education, that they get the same jobs, that they get the same treatment in all areas of civil life and in their daily contacts in the society. Women and ethnic minorities should be represented in decision-making, politics... name it!

**>> I want to see figures and facts that show me that women and ethnic minorities are effectively integrated.**

Where there is political commitment, there can be progress.

### **Obstacles**

The main obstacle is a lack of political will in general, this misconception about the reality behind emancipation. This misconception that an inclusion policy is all that is needed; that no specific strategies need to be developed for specific groups.

Presently, there is no strategy. There are case-by-case actions, and there are some initiatives supported by the district that, fortunately, do have a strategy.

To overcome these obstacles, political support will be needed as well as perseverance.

**>> Obstacles can be overcome with political support and perseverance.**

## **Resources (financial and human)**

To encourage and eventually operate policy changes in order to put gender equality promotion back on the political agenda, we must network and collaborate with other decision-makers who share our views. We must collaborate with other people, at different levels of decision-making, who are willing to support us, such as the City of Rotterdam and allies in the Executive Committees.

Our resources are shared beliefs and the will to change things.

It is a question of lobbying, networking, trying to find different paths and different alliances to reach our goals.

## **Lessons learned**

When I reviewed host partners in the project Latent Potential, I saw that we, in the Netherlands, were not there yet in terms of promoting women in decision making, nor in terms of gender equality in general.



In the Netherlands, we think we have reached our targets, but we have not. When one looks at figures, it is obvious that equality has not been achieved and that white Dutch female emancipation, woman emancipation in general or migrants' emancipation is an ongoing process. Figures show that we have not reached our goal yet.

Through the peer review process, I have been able to share experiences with other partners in Europe. I am impressed at the variety we find in the European Union in terms of policies, achievements. This is not a judgement but an observation: it opened my mind. It was a lesson. I could witness other EU realities. I learned that there was still work to do in terms of integration!

**>> I learned that integration is still ahead of us.**

## Pauline Hurd



### PROFESSIONAL PROFILE

<b>Current Work</b>	Development officer within a community setting
<b>Area</b>	Birmingham, UK
<b>Education and Professional Training</b>	Extensive Community Development experience with Local Residents and Community Groups; capacity building of residents.
<b>Professional areas of interest</b>	Within my area of expertise (below) : looking at sustainability issues; Training issues / needs analysis for groups
<b>Areas of Expertise</b>	Social inclusion; Race empowerment; support community groups;

### PROJECT PROFILE

<b>Participant</b>	Pauline Hurd
<b>Area</b>	Birmingham, United Kingdom of Great Britain
<b>Project</b>	Black History Trail
<b>Theme</b>	<b>Empowerment through family/community interaction</b>

### Socio-economic context

Evidence from population statistics suggests that 50% of school children in Birmingham are from ethnic minority communities. However, the history curriculum which they receive at school is predominantly Anglocentric. The contribution to the success of the city by our ancestors is neither mapped nor recognised!

Siren wanted to celebrate the achievements of these communities by establishing links with organisations both statutory and voluntary by establishing a visible trail of previous notable individuals from Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) communities that made a significant contribution to English Society with a particular emphasis on Birmingham.

A pilot Black History Trail developed by an ex Birmingham Poet Laureate for SIREN produced evidence of a vast array of materials, places of interest, archive materials and facts about the BME contribution to Birmingham's history and growth.

## **Project descriptions and objectives**

As Chair of SIREN, I have personally championed this project and it is something that I will continue with. I am a strong believer in recognising the success and contribution that Black and Minority Ethnic communities have made to this City. This project reflects my personal commitment to this issue and I hope that this contribution, however small, may encourage others to develop and build on the work and issues that this project raises.

We aim to build on this project, enable more detailed research and development and wider dissemination.

We aim to raise awareness of Black History and the BME contribution to the growth and development of Birmingham. It will foster community cohesion by enabling a wider understanding of black history by all communities.

It will encourage a sense of pride in the young BME community who have little or no knowledge of their history. It will encourage more Black History Month events and creativity around the arts by providing a solid knowledge base for the development of more innovative and varied curriculum activities.

## **Results, evaluation and obstacles**

We approached the staff at Aston Hall to showcase our Black Family Fun Day. This venue is an historic building set in idyllic surroundings within the heart of Aston near the Aston Villa football ground. The area has a large black and ethnic minority community, yet the people who accessed the building despite it being open for all, were not attracting representative members of the local community. We approached the Senior Staff at the hall to discuss an event that would encourage more of the local community to access the building and we were made to feel very welcome in our effort.

We engaged with BME Artistes to attend the event, to either promote their arts, poetry, dance routines, culinary skills, and to display their talents. The day attracted around 250 individuals, plus some of those people who were wondering within the grounds of Aston Hall as day visitors. We recruited the local poet laureate to launch the BME trail and to let people know a little about the history of black communities within Birmingham. The concept of the trail received quite a bit of interest on the day.

As a consequence of good promotion and planning a successful event was held and the feedback was well received.

## **Evaluation**

We asked all those attending the day event to give us their thoughts and views of the day. This was done on an evaluation chart which we asked people to sign before they left. Overall the day was well received with some recommendations of the types of events that they would like to see SIREN deliver in the future.

All in all we learnt some key lessons, and would ensure that we have plenty of time to plan similar events, with dedicated staff and a budget that would enable us to do pay for what we wanted.

### **Resources (financial and human)**

With support from the SIREN Steering group members in terms of time given, we were able to issue out specific tasks such as people costing up research time, materials for producing an interactive CD, cost of showcasing an event for Black History Month to launch the BME Trail, and all the workshops that were involved within that programme.

We put in small bids to the following funders:

- Lottery Awards for All - £5,000
- Birmingham Education Dept £9,000
- Four Staff @ 30 hours each – gifted time
- Venue – Aston Hall – Gifted

### **Lessons learned**

One of the key lessons learnt for me, was to ensure that we have utmost trust in the people we were paying to run with specific areas of the project, such as the administration and the booking of artistes to carry. We found that some of the quality of the work was not up to a standard that could be used in the way we expected to have it, despite our explanation of what we wanted it for. This could have been due to a misunderstanding from both the organisation team (SIREN) and the people carrying out the work.

The time and gaps between meetings to discuss our concerns were problematic, as we left the booking of sequence meetings too far apart to do anything constructive. This meant that problems were not picked up early enough to give time to get them sorted. This I felt was due to not having a dedicated worker who was specifically responsible for co-ordinating the whole project/programme efforts.

Financial monitoring of expenditure was also something that we were not adhering to. This is usual for community run organisations, as no one person is held accountable for the money. However it is fair to say that all receipts and expenditure did tally up at the end of the event, although we ran slightly over budget!

## Pilar Dominguez

### PROFESSIONAL PROFILE

<b>Current Work</b>	Manager of the Human Resources
<b>Area</b>	Torremocha de Jarama, Madrid, Spain
<b>Education and Professional Training</b>	Degree in Law; Master Degree in Local Development; former work as a lawyer
<b>Professional areas of interest</b>	Human Resources and Local Development
<b>Areas of Expertise</b>	Human Resources and Local Development

### PROJECT PROFILE

<b>Participant</b>	Pilar Domínguez Fernández
<b>Area</b>	Torremocha de Jarama, Madrid, Spain
<b>Project</b>	Social Cooperative “Asermut” <sup>9</sup>
<b>Theme</b>	<b>Elderly care and women participation in the social economy</b>

### Socio-economic context

The project starts in a very little village in 1989. A very little village with just 140 inhabitants, in an area which is classified as Objective 5B of the E.U.

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<sup>9</sup> More on this cooperative , in Spanish, following the links :  
[www.madridcoop.org/html\\_ucmta/cis/fichas/asermut.html](http://www.madridcoop.org/html_ucmta/cis/fichas/asermut.html) or  
[www.madridcoop.org/html\\_ucmta/cis/Doc/contact1.html](http://www.madridcoop.org/html_ucmta/cis/Doc/contact1.html)

## **Project description and objectives**

### Key issues/problems to be addressed

The problems addressed by the project concern:

- Progressive aging process affecting the population in this village, and in other similar villages of the Autonomous Community of Madrid, given by the young people leaving and emigrating without an incoming demographic flow
- Emigration process of young people, mainly towards Madrid for study and work reasons.

### Objectives delivered and actions taken

The objectives of this project can be summed up this way:

- Actions aiming at taking care of the elderly people, providing them essential welfare services to improve their quality of life
- Actions and measures to give opportunities for the young people to stay in the village and have a job
- This village must not be abandoned
- To create employment and economic and social development to regenerate the urban structure.

These objectives were meant to be achieved by two means:

- Building a House residence for elderly people;
- Training courses in order to have specialized personnel with competences and knowledge on geroculture (specialization about how to deal and treat elderly people).

## **Results, evaluation and obstacles**

The results of the project could be summed up this way:

- Development of the cooperative of workers: in the beginning they were 13 persons and now we are 150, 95% of them are women;
- Development of the village: now there are 400 inhabitants, a primary school and a canteen for the children, in order to let their mothers work;
- Development of the social economy in the local rural domain: currently the cooperative of women manages two Residences, one of them of 95 people, the other one of 50 people, 3 Daily Centres (Centros de Dia) with a total of 70 people and provides a help and care service at home to about 200 people in 60 different cities, in addition to provide professional care services to other Residences Houses, Daily Centres or other Centres for elderly people;

- Transfer of this development model to other villages on the mountains of the “Sierra”;
- Involvement and participation of workers into their own project;
- Quality of the service delivered;
- Promotion of women in the labour market and empowerment; even though that is a sector traditionally taken care of by women, either at their home in the family environment, looking after old people and children, or professionally, and differently from other Residences Houses and Centres for elderly people, either private or public, in our cooperative all the assistance centres and welfare services are directed by women at each level of responsibility: Directors, Coordinators and Heads are women, as well as are mostly women all the professionals of a certain level, such as doctors, nurses, working trainers, physiotherapists, etc.

### **Resources (financial and human)**

The budget for the project initially was financed by the cooperative’s workers personal contributions to the common social capital, by public subventions allocated to build up the residence, and public funds to support the personnel in the beginning of the action, and public subventions for the elderly people living in the residence.

The main obstacles we encountered was the lack of skilled and well trained personnel in health care for elderly people, and the total lack of training centres and schools in the rural areas.

### **Lessons learned**

The lessons we can learn from the experience of our service are several:

- **Continuous training, and long life learning**, is the engine for promoting the women’s employment and their insertion and development in the labour market;
- This **professional development is the basis of their economic independence, and subsequently of their personal development**;
- The local development is guaranteed by a small cooperative in a local environment: this provides a **higher quality of life** than in big cities and than in big companies.

## Raffaella Tonioli



### PROFESSIONAL PROFILE

<b>Current Work</b>	Consultant for the <b>Municipality of Venice</b> . Participation in gender oriented projects, more specifically on long-term unemployment and discrimination: “Women at Work Desk” is a service created together by the Municipality and the Province of Venice, for women that want to be reintegrated in the labour market after a period of unemployment.
<b>Area</b>	Venice, Italy
<b>Educational and Professional Training</b>	Graduated in Psychology from the University of Padova, 2000. Specialization in group’s dynamic, and about valuing Human Resource. Matriculation to the University of Padova, Faculty of Law, 2003.
<b>Professional areas of interest</b>	Human Resources and Equal Opportunities
<b>Areas of Expertise</b>	Human Resources, Equal Opportunities, Gender oriented projects

### PROJECT PROFILE

<b>Participant</b>	Raffaella Toniolo
<b>Area</b>	Venice, Italy
<b>Project</b>	Venice City Council, Centre for Women – Info-desk “Women at work” <sup>10</sup>
<b>Theme</b>	<b>Long term unemployment</b>

### Socio-economic context

The Venice City Council area is very spread out and socially varied: the historic centre of Venice, the islands in the lagoon, Marghera and Mestre, the new industrial district on the mainland. Venice is the main city with the lowest pro-capita income in the whole North east part of Italy, as the productive districts are elsewhere in that region. The economy of the mainland is strongly characterized by industry -even though this kind of production is decreasing because of deep productive restructuring- and by the harbour (industrial and commercial); the harbour still gives a very good economic impulse to the city, while the historic centre of Venice seems to be stuck in the tourism sector, with intensive exploitation.

<sup>10</sup> More information in Italian about the project: <http://www.provincia.venezia.it/lavoro/donne.htm>



There is a very ancient tradition (coming from the “Serenissima” Republic) of welfare services, and they are deeply widespread. In the last ten years they have been focusing on the way to face all the new social problems linked to the new marginality caused by a growing social complexity. This has brought to develop very leading and edgy pilot projects, and then they turned out to become permanent services. Experiments have been made on social services more specifically oriented to the new categories of people needing social intervention. The approach has been experimental in the beginning and very innovative, facing the challenge of the new social emergencies.

## **Project description and objectives**

### **Key issues/problems addressed**

One of these new services, born as a pilot project to meet the problem of growing unemployment is the Info-desk “Women at Work” (“Sportello Donne al Lavoro”): it is a service created by two local government bodies, the Council and the Province: the Council Department for Women’s Citizenship and Culture of Difference (Assessorato comunale alla Cittadinanza delle Donne e Cultura delle Differenze), working with the Women Centre (Centro Donna) and the Centre against Violence on Women (Centro Violenza sulle Donne), joined the Province Department for Work and Professional Competence (Assessorato provinciale al Lavoro e alla Competenza Professionale), and together they created the Info-desk “Women at Work”.

This service advises women, either those who already have a job, but who are unsatisfied for some reason and would like to change career or employer, and those who are unemployed and would like to go back to work. Its activity is then orienting (or re-orienting) women to work, and re-evaluating and re-assess their competences: the work is done through structured sessions on an individual or group session.

Originally the service has been created as an experiment, from the easy observation that at the Employment Centre 60% of the people looking for a job were women. The Info-desk is then established in 2001, and since then more than 3000 women have been advised: with some of them the contact has been just on the phone.

This is a service open to the whole territory, it is not just offered to residents, and both offices are situated in Mestre, Venice’s industrial heart which is affected by a growing reindustrialisation and increasingly by unemployment.

### **Objectives and actions taken**

By working in a network with other welfare services, the Info-desk “Women at Work” contaminates them with a gender approach, while sometimes it enriches the gender approach with related-work issues; for instance the cooperation with the Centre against Violence on Women meets the theoretical and practical awareness that the first way for a woman to escape violence is her economic independence.

Primary objectives of this service are:

- **women empowerment**

- **their reinsertion and**
- **their professional re-qualification**

The increase of women in the professional environment is considered not only as actual employment, but also as how many women become pro-active and start looking for a job, which is a data very hard to quantify.

Being a service for professional orientation, this is often mistaken for a cross service of jobs offered and sought. But in a way the contact with the professional environment is very close, as the Info-desk is located in the Centre for Employment Centre: they are setting up a network with interim agencies, and together with the body Veneto Work (Veneto Lavoro) they are financing a number of internships.

### **Results, evaluation and obstacles**

Among the results we can list:

- A continuous increase of users
- Organization of pre-training courses (max 24 hours) for women's entrepreneurial skills and for self-employment

The indicators are mainly the collected data: at the back we have the daily forms filled in by all the women who called for help, and ahead we have the 2002 survey.

### **Evaluation**

In 2002, after the service had been active for a year, the operators in charge proceeded with a follow up to assess how many women had started looking actively for a job, among those having called for help, how many of them had found a job, and with what type of contract. Those women have been contacted on the phone, they have been submitted a form to fill in, and then all those data have been processed and shown in a conference.

The indicators used have been quantitative figures: concerning the contacts they have been used the daily forms where it was recorded the person's details: if she was employed, the service offered to her, if she was sent to another service, and the source how she got in contact with the Info-desk. It was found out that the professional re-insertion has been higher than expected: and more permanent full time jobs than part time jobs.

It was also underlined the misunderstanding about the service content: the attitude and the approach has then been changed and now aims at providing in a very clear way the tools for stimulating an active job hunting.

### **Resources (financial and human)**

The resources have been provided on an equal basis by the Province Government and by the Council; the personnel is composed by two operators, one full time and the other one part time, and two service managers, one appointed from the Council the second one by the Province.

Both local governments have provided offices, computers, the budget for advertising, etc.

The service is open 12 hours a week: 8, split in two days, are provided at the Centre for Employment, a Province body, and the remaining four hours at the Centre for Women.

### **Lessons learned**

The lessons to be learnt from a social action experience based on dialogue/cooperation strategies with different social actors are several:

- How the **network is important** and how difficult is to keep it alive and dynamic: working in a network implies a continuous mediating activity and communication updated on a daily basis, because when information is missing, this may create many misunderstandings;
- **Women** are seen as a **resource** to be valued also for the professional environment: competences are there, it is requested just a higher flexibility taking into consideration the fact that most women have a double work, including the “care taking” activities at home;
- In spite of being created by two welfare services, the Info-desk managers are considering of **opening to the social economy**: they are checking offers in order to find new funds for increasing their activities.

## Tanya Hughes



### PROFESSIONAL PROFILE

<b>Current Work</b>	Bamlybeen Women's Centres, Responsible for overall management
<b>Area</b>	Belfast, Northern Ireland (UK)
<b>Education and Professional Training</b>	Experience of participating in a number of decision-making bodies; working collaboratively with a wide range of organisations in the development of services that seek to enhance the social, economic and cultural status of women, young people and children.
<b>Professional areas of interest</b>	Training and providing young people and women esp. with better skills; confidence building and empowerment; child care/young pregnancies and other gender issues
<b>Areas of Expertise</b>	Women centres & women support; child care; training & education; empowerment.

### PROJECT PROFILE

<b>Participant</b>	<a href="#">Tanya Hughes</a>
<b>Area</b>	Belfast, Northern Ireland (UK)
<b>Project</b>	Ballybeen Women's centre "Steps to the Future" Programme
<b>Theme</b>	Women, empowerment through education and training

### Socio-economic context

Ballybeen is the second largest housing estate in Northern Ireland with a population exceeding 9000. It is situated in the outskirts of East Belfast and is a sprawling estate, which covers three electoral wards – Enler, Carrowreagh and Graham's Bridge and is contained within the Borough of Castlereagh. According to the 2001 Census there are total of 9170 persons living in the three wards. The Noble figures for Enler reflect the significant nature of problems experienced in Ballybeen. It ranks 123 out of 566 ( 1 representing highest deprivation) in Northern Ireland terms and is within the 15% of worst wards in relation to the health, education and child poverty domains. The area is poorly serviced in terms of statutory provision and has been affected by the polarisation that has occurred as a result of the

'troubles' and has a strong single identity protestant culture. 53% of the population is female, compared with the Northern Ireland average of 51%. 20% of lone female parents with dependant children, living in Castlereagh Borough, live in Ballybeen. In 2001 (the latest Child Health Statistics) 13% of births in Enler were to teenage mothers, this was above both the Local Health Trust (5.5%) and Regional Health Board (8.1%) averages. Slightly lower numbers were recorded in Grahams Bridge of 6.1%, although still above the Trusts average and in Carrowreagh of 4.3%, slightly below the Trust average.

Castlereagh economic partnership 'A Review of the Local Economy 1998' found that the most deprived wards in Ballybeen distinctly lacked employment opportunities in professional occupations with the majority of the employed population being in semi skilled/manual occupations. The statistics for female unemployment relate only to those women who are registered as unemployed and looking for work. The true figure for female unemployment is believed to be significantly higher as government statistics do not take account of unemployed female spouses/partners of unemployed males. Areas of high unemployment are also those where population has limited formal qualifications. Statistics show that over 80% of those unemployed and living in Ballybeen have no formal qualifications.

Ballybeen, once a stable and desirable estate, is now experiencing decline, a view supported by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE). In a recent mapping exercise the NIHE pointed to rising levels of dependency and social deprivation in outlying estates such as Ballybeen. A situation further exacerbated by the recent closure of a major employer in the area – TKECC –resulting in the loss of 550 jobs, many of them occupied by women.

Ballybeen has suffered as a consequence of the conflict:

- Polarisation of the community – a strong single identity area which displays sectarian division and has resulted in the ghettoisation of areas, civil unrest, paramilitary feuding and fear of travelling to or mixing with communities outside their own.
- A very significant decline in industry and business e.g. ship building, as well as lower levels of inward investment and higher unemployment, a legacy of the conflict is that areas such as Ballybeen particularly amongst young people, many of whom are leaving school with little or no qualifications, there is an unemployment culture as opposed to self employment, but without the accustomed sources of employment and with an aversion to risk and to self-employment.
- Relatively low numbers of entrepreneurs to create new jobs – a shortage of people with the enterprise attributes also necessary for the job opportunities being created in areas such as ICT, software etc.
- Educational underachievement – within Ballybeen there are high levels of literacy/numeracy difficulties e.g. within Enler ward 80% of the adult population have no formal qualifications, ranking them within the worst 5% of Northern Irelands wards (Noble).

Castlereagh is a predominantly Protestant area and research has shown that the lowest levels of social inclusion and community participation occur in Protestant areas. Due to their low socio-economic circumstances women and young people are particularly marginalized within the community and have low levels of self-esteem and confidence.

## **Project description and objectives**

**AIM >> to empower marginalized women to return to the labour market with confidence by widening access to education and training opportunities.**

Objectives:

- Identify and address barriers faced by women returning to education and training through the provision of crèche facilities and a supportive learning environment.
- Encourage the acquisition of ICT skills from basic IT skills to CLAIT to ECDL.
- Provide opportunities for women to improve basic literacy and numeracy skills and increase their confidence levels.
- Encourage the acquisition of new skills and accredited qualifications through a range of education and training courses
- Provision of job search skills training to enable women to participate within the labour market.
- Provide support and assistance in identifying education and training needs and appropriate progression routes.

The Steps to the Future programme seeks to empower disadvantaged women by improving their levels of formal educational qualifications, skills and confidence and consequently improve their socio-economic status. The target group comprises women who have been out of the labour market for some considerable time (the majority of whom will not be on the unemployment register), who have little or no recognised qualifications and women who are currently in low paid, part time employment (defined as the ‘learning poor’ by New Labour), who are seeking to improve their employability through the acquisition of new skills and qualifications.

Many women who have been out of education/training/labour market for some time suffer from low self-esteem and low confidence levels and re-entry into the formal education/training environment is especially daunting. They neither have the confidence, information nor base level skills to enrol on existing government training schemes or to avail of education/training opportunities offered by local FE Colleges/Open Learning Centres. Such schemes and initiatives and colleges are not sufficiently flexible nor accessible to meet their needs and nor do they provide childcare. In addition low paid, part-time work (women making up the majority in this category) offers little in the way of meaningful on the job training and such workers are therefore caught in a ‘poverty trap’.

Women still remain the primary carers in Northern Ireland and because many women shoulder caring responsibilities, some in addition to their low paid work outside the home, the way in which formal learning and training schemes has been structured in the past has disadvantaged women.

Ballybeen Women’s Centre provides a first step back to education and training opportunities for those experiencing greatest social exclusion.

Through the Steps to the Future programme Ballybeen Women’s Centre recognises and addresses the barriers women face returning to education, training and employment by taking a holistic approach and adopting an integrated service delivery model:

- An informal and supportive learning environment for women returners
- High quality free crèche provision
- Flexible timetabling of courses which takes account of women's domestic and family responsibilities
- A wide-ranging high quality training and education programme which offers pre-vocational, educational and training courses, the majority of which have nationally recognised accreditation
- Accessible education and training in terms of cost
- The support of an Education and Training Officer to assist women in identifying their needs and also appropriate progression routes
- A basic skills facility to assist women in improving numeracy and literacy skills and an extensive resource library

The needs of the particular target group that the programme is focused on do not have their needs met by any existing government training scheme/initiative nor by local FE Colleges/Open Learning Centres.

Ballybeen Women's Centre promotes the value of learning, is community based and brings learning to the 'learning poor'.

The project aims to empower women by offering a comprehensive variety of education and training options divided into different steps. It especially encourages the attainment of basic literacy and numeracy skills, pre vocational and confidence building and ICT skills in order that women can fully participate in other education and training opportunities and/or labour market, therefore addressing the gender gap in employment. There is one to one support and assistance from an Education and Training Officer for women in identifying the appropriate entry level to this project which will involve examining their education and training needs and also identifying the appropriate progression route from this project. An integral part of this is the provision of job search techniques.

The organisation works with a range of education and training providers e.g. Castlereagh College, Ards Open Learning Centre etc. to effectively meet the learning needs of these women. In identifying progression routes this organisation has developed links with local employers re: job placements and employment opportunities to facilitate the acquisition of additional skills and further improve employability.

The Steps to the Future programme promotes the value and benefits of education, lifelong learning and skills development. The provision of a supportive learning environment, which addresses the barriers women face in returning to education/training is an innovative and successful model of practice. The emphasis is on confidence building, the development of basic and key skills, and the acquisition of recognised qualifications. The programme will enable women to make a more confident transition into the formal education/training programmes or labour market.

## **Results, evaluation and obstacles**

### **Project results**

The Ballybeen Women’s Centre has a track record of enrolling women onto education and training courses, successfully completing courses and gaining accredited qualifications. The past 4 years enrolment numbers illustrates this:

<b>Year</b>	<b>No of Enrolments</b>
2000-2001	206
2001-2002	220
2002-2003	218
2003-2004	238

and by the number of completers and qualifications gained:

<b>Years</b>	<b>No. of Completers</b>	<b>No. of Qualifications Gained</b>
1998-2000	378	356
2000-2002	406	375
2002-2004	438	412

The qualifications gained included GCSEs in English, Maths, Sociology, OCR Level 1 in CLAIT and Internet Technologies, City and Guilds Level 1 – equivalent to NVQ Level 1; OCR Stage 2 in IBT, Word Processing– equivalent to NVQ Level 2; National Open College Levels 1 and 2; the European Computer Driving Licence; St John Ambulance Public First Aid Certificates and Driving Theory tests.

The Centre has always supported and encouraged progression of women into further education/training and employment. Job search skills are offered through courses and on a one to one basis.

<b>Number gaining employment</b>	
1998 – 2000	8%
2000 – 2002	7%
2002 – 2004	8%

As well as a proven track record of providing ‘value for money’, the Education and Training Programme supports capacity building and the development of a sustainable community within Ballybeen.

In terms of social capital, both qualitative and quantitative indicators suggest that Ballybeen Women’s Centre as an integrated service provider has contributed to capacity building and social cohesion within an area of low and weak community infrastructure.

Through such programmes as Steps to the Future they are given the opportunity to build on existing skills and acquire new qualifications and skills. Women are empowered and engaged through new confidence and skills gained. One of the most tangible ways that this has been evidenced is in the increased levels of women participating in local community activity and taking a leadership role in such activity. They are also enabled to participate within other aspects of the Women’ Centre work including sitting on the Management Committee and volunteering.



They are encouraged to become engaged with other communities and sectors by participating in relationships and networks cross community e.g. Women into Politics Programmes, cross border e.g. the Cross Border Women's Collective Partnership and European wide e.g. Grundtvig Learning Partnerships. They are supported to move on to further education and training, employment and to become more active citizens involved in community initiatives aimed at improving the quality of life in the area.

### Evaluation

All women entering the project are monitored and a database records relevant details as they enter the project, their progression through it and where they go when they leave the project. After each course is completed each participant completes an evaluation form and an annual internal evaluation of the education and training programme is carried out. This research assists in monitoring the target group's needs and also taking account of government strategies, contributes towards the planning of further education and training programmes within the organisation.

The Centre regularly contributes to and participates in research being carried out on the women's community education and training and respond to any consultation carried out by government and statutory bodies.

### **Obstacles and constraints**

Long term sustainability is the key issue in terms of obstacles and constraints. Ballybeen Women's Centre is a community based NGO and is reliant upon securing funding from a range of sources to sustain its work. The biggest obstacle and constraint facing Steps to the Future is securing funding to sustain the project.

### **Resources (human and financial)**

#### Human

1 X Education and Training Officer (programme Co-ordinator)  
1 X Outreach and Support Worker  
4 X Early Years Officers to do  
Admin, management and finance support

#### Financial

£111,000 circa per annum

### **Lessons learned**

I believe that factors that determine success are:

- **Effective consultation and engagement with service users**

- Ability to **break down the barriers that inhibit women** from accessing opportunities that will enhance their socio-economic and personal circumstances
- Quality, affordable childcare
- Adoption of a **holistic approach** based on the principles and practice of community development
- Ability to secure funding

## Yasmin Mahmood



### PROFESSIONAL PROFILE

<b>Current Work</b>	Social Inclusion & Equalities Officer in Social Inclusion & Equalities Strateg Project, Northamptonshire County Council,
<b>Area</b>	Northamptonshire County, United Kingdom of Great Britain
<b>Education and Professional Training</b>	Social and community services : management and steering groups
<b>Professional areas of interest</b>	Advice, support and day care services for Asian women and girls in Northampton in a range of areas - including, services for the elderly, physically disabled, domestic abuse, carers, youth, employment and training.
<b>Areas of Expertise</b>	Woman empowerment and fight against racism

### PROJECT PROFILE

<b>Participant</b>	Yasmin Mahmood
<b>Area</b>	Northamptonshire County, United Kingdom of Great Britain
<b>Project</b>	Dostyio
<b>Theme</b>	<b>Woman empowerment and fight against racism, domestic violence</b>

### Socio-economic context

The County of Northamptonshire is situated south East of Birmingham, it is characterized by pockets of wealth and pockets of great poverty. The global representation of ethnic minorities in the County is 10%, mostly concentrated in the city of Northampton. Traditionally, the County's economy was dominated by manufacturing.

I worked for two years in a non-governmental organisation called "Dostyio" in Northampton.

This organisation "Dostiyo" started in 1979, being a very small agency providing basic advice and advocacy for women, because at that period there were a lot of women who were migrating to the UK from Africa, they were going through a difficult emotional phase in life and there was no service that catered for their basic needs.

## **Project description and objectives**

Our work was mostly general advocacy work. Though a lot of women who had migrated to the UK recently were going through a difficult emotional phase, they were suffering from local dislocation and some women, especially the older women, did not even know English. At that time, a number of women were coming to the UK, from Africa, and were granted asylum here. Asian women themselves developed the agency in 1979.

They developed language courses, day care classes. Other services slowly developed such as:

- looking after handicapped women
- a youth group for young girls
- a program to support women fleeing from domestic abuse, though this had funding problems

In 2001, the agency received a capital grant with which it was able to set up a big day care centre, organising classes for women, provide general advocacy work, advice for disabled woman and day care.

At that time, my role as was a strategic one. The big development was to develop support for women suffering domestic abuse.

The cases of domestic violence I had handled on my first year were around 40, coming referred to us by police, refugee institutions, hospitals. These women needed housing, they needed immigration advice etc. If a foreign woman marries a British citizen, she has no right for nationality for two years: we campaigned so that abused women would be able to stay in the UK. These women could not return home for cultural reasons, returning was shameful. We lobbied the Home Office to sustain their claims to stay, encouraged their resettlement in other Counties. We worked in parallel with the Bangladeshi women association and other agencies. We had legal backing to support us when it came to confidentiality.

With the women, we worked on how the women could move on after abuse.

Nowadays, on its website [http://www.sunflower-centre.org/page\\_multi.htm](http://www.sunflower-centre.org/page_multi.htm), “Dostiyo” is described as voluntary organisation run by and for Asian women and girls, a friendly and supportive confidential facility.

The website <http://www.multikulti.org.uk/agencies/english/east-midlands/20110/> outlines that “Dostiyo” offers advocacy, befriending and counselling services. It also provides advice for Asian women on a range of issues, including benefits, debt, housing, domestic violence, disability, immigration, drug and alcohol misuse. It provides day care and education for older people. It serves a very affordable lunch. Cheap transport to the centre is provided (50p return). The agency nowadays also runs an Asian men's social and sports club and youth services.

When I was working there, the organisation was paid by the Council to provide services such as:

- Immigration: helping people write their applications for regularization, naturalisation.; general advise and information, advocacy services

- Information about welfare rights and services
- Information about health, access to health services and health education
- General advise on education
- Information about elderly care

## **Results, evaluation and obstacles**

### Obstacles

A lot of obstacles had to do with lack of funds.

It was sometimes difficult to explain what benefits users got; fortunately at family level, there weren't too many problems with women frequenting the centre because it was a women only centre. That mattered.

As we were very careful about confidentiality, and since there were several agencies dealing with domestic violence, including "Sunflower", the "abusers" in the community did not necessarily know that a woman came to us. There were cases of men verbally abusing our workers but I never had the problem myself. Moreover, we cared for cases from all over the UK and we collaborated with other centres hence, sent our women elsewhere too if needed.

### Evaluation of results

We annually evaluated our case records using several methods:

1. User feed-back from daily users: not necessarily written feed-back by users given that some elderly women could not write, but we interviewed users, we would also ask users to share their good ideas about workshops they wanted to hold. The most highly requested workshops were often about health issues, cancer, diabetes.
2. we also had to do an annual evaluation linked to the fact that we were [quality marked](#). We did telephone interviews to check if users were satisfied. In relation to this, we also had complaints procedures and a complaints record. As part of the annual report we did statistics on for each services, problems, needs... We were required to do statistical beak-down by language, ethnic origin, age... we did it very carefully (although by hand) because that is part of the [quality management](#) procedure. This is how the increasing trend of families coming to us with children who had learning disabilities could be so clearly pinned down.
3. another way to evaluate the quality of the centre's activities was through "user groups" who would meet with the scope of identifying needs and priorities. They would meet once a week and talk about issues, desires, time-tables.

## **Resources (human and financial)**

### Human resources

At Dostyo we had:

- 3 full-time paid workers
- 2 part-time paid workers
- 3 sessional workers coming only to give classes (youth group and lunch club)
- 2 to 5 regular volunteers who would come for a few hours a day each, 1 or 2 days a week
- a big pool of voluntaries (30-50) for events

And about 250 members who would each pay a 2 GBP annual membership fee.

### Financial resources

The agency started being a charity based in the Northampton College at first. Then the charity moved out of the College and received one secondment staff from the Council to do advocacy work.

In 2001, the agency received a capital grant with which it was able to set up a big day care centre, organising classes for women, there were voluntary opportunities to do basic administration work courses, give English language classes, providing employment training (linking and sending the women to dedicated organisations providing employment training).

Other resources include:

- Training provided by public funds and various organisations
- As a registered charity you can apply for funding from different bodies and trusts
- Charities on the other hand have a special legal status

A lot of obstacles had to do with lack of funds.

### Lessons learned

**Skills** >> if you are able to identify the work you want to do, train for it.

**Strategic working** >> working in collaboration with other agencies and other organisations to be able to share resources ie. day care etc. We also earned money for hiring our day care centre for example which is not negligible.

**Information and networking** >> to promote gender empowerment you need to share information on seminars, publications, networking. I think that mentoring is interesting for that.

If there are too few women at top management, it is not only about **lobbying** but also about **skills**.