

North Staffordshire Regeneration Partnership

Training to enable cross-partnership working

Overview

Despite being recognised as a priority need for regeneration, Stoke and the North Staffordshire sub-region was 'underperforming'. The North Staffordshire Regeneration Partnership (NSRP) was set up to draw various organisations together, to encourage better coordinated working practices. The appointment of 'regeneration champions', within specific organisations, was backed up by a training programme. The champions experienced masterclasses, site visits and action learning sets. Not only has this increased individuals' job satisfaction and self-confidence, but the participants have established better networks and cross-disciplinary working methods.

North Staffordshire is one of two priority areas for regeneration in the West Midlands. It was seen as a sub-region that was underperforming, with issues around capacity and slow delivery. North Staffordshire Regeneration Partnership (NSRP) was created, in response to these issues, to embed good practice surrounding sustainable community issues throughout the new partnership.

Regeneration West Midlands (Regen WM) produced a programme of master classes, site visits and action learning sets with the aim of bringing about culture change within NSRP. And the partnership nominated 21 'regeneration champions' to participate on the course.

By the end of the programme, participants reported increased job satisfaction and self-confidence, as well as improved networks and cross-disciplinary working. The partnership approach has enabled a cross-disciplinary team of 'regeneration champions' who act as catalysts and ambassadors for change on an ongoing basis.

Summary

- The North Staffordshire Regeneration Partnership (NSRP) was created in response to problems of low capacity and slow delivery in regenerating the Stoke area.
- Regeneration West Midlands (Regen WM) produced a programme of master classes, site visits and action learning sets to bring about culture change within NSRP
- Participants were drawn from a range of disciplines and were seen as regeneration champions - to break down old ways of working and facilitate stronger cross-disciplinary approaches
- Individual participants built confidence, wider contacts, more job satisfaction and higher skills in cross disciplinary working
- NRSP has benefitted from new thinking and a new approach across the partnership members, which it expects to result in higher quality regeneration

Background

North Staffordshire had been recognised as a 'priority need' in terms of the regeneration of the West Midlands area. It was seen as a sub-region that was underperforming, with issues around capacity and slow delivery.

Regeneration needed to be seen to be clearly 'partnership-led'. The creation of the North Staffordshire Regeneration Partnership (NSRP) was a response to these factors. It represented the drawing together of various regeneration initiatives across North Staffordshire under a single management structure.

Regeneration West Midlands (Regen WM) was keen to explore working with an entire organisation rather than just individual professionals, in order to create sufficient momentum to bring about 'culture change' within that organisation."

The Project

The purpose of the project was to embed good practice in sustainable communities into this new innovative partnership, and to raise aspirations of what could be achieved through regeneration for Stoke.

RegenWM decided to facilitate a programme of training events. The programme was designed to develop the partnership's vision and core skills. It was delivered as a learning programme that included a suite of training activities targeted at 21 'regeneration champions'. The champions are individuals who can act as innovators within a partnership to break down old structures and ways of working and facilitate a much stronger cross-disciplinary approach. The learning programme included:

- Masterclasses to explore specific issues vital to the creation of sustainable communities, in more depth and delivered by recognised experts in their field.
- Site Visits made to areas with similar regeneration challenges, to learn how other practitioners have tackled the key issues.
- Action Learning Sets designed for small groups of participants to ask questions, seek answers, gain support and be challenged as they work on real problems and implement solutions.

The Impact

The programme has generated benefits for participants including:

- widening personal horizons;
- increasing job satisfaction;
- building self confidence;
- improved networking;
- cross disciplinary working.

The partnership has benefited from the success of the programme since it now has a cross disciplinary team of 'champions' who can act as the 'ambassadors of change' and who can help drive through an innovative business plan for the partnership.

This business plan and regeneration vision for the North Staffordshire area will create sustainable communities through the delivery of the expectations for the region in the

Regional Spatial Strategy. It should also result in an improvement in the quality of regeneration in the North Staffordshire area.

Feedback has been good and positive.....

Quote:

"I found the whole experience very useful and worthwhile, particularly the networking aspects."

"Overall I found it to be extremely useful and would recommend that it is rolled out further to other staff within the Directorate."

The way of thinking of the participants has changed in the direction required and this has generated a more positive attitude towards the partnership as a whole. Participants are adopting a more evaluative approach to their work and are making use of the contacts they have made to bring in new elements and new thinking.

Some of the champions feel more positive about their jobs and the organisation as a whole. They feel that there is a desire to invest in their future as an individual.

Quote:

"I was surprised and privileged to be part of the learning lab. Surprised that I could even get anything out of the experience and privileged to be the only member of the Development Control to be nominated from such a large division!"

"Initially I had low expectations of the process, but the more I did the greater the reward in terms of wider understanding and a feeling of being a valued member of staff."

There is a valuable legacy from the project in so far as it has created an organisation now focused on active learning and committed to effective team building in order to tackle regeneration and sustainable communities challenges and opportunities.

If the partnership can begin to work more effectively in this 'inspirational' and cross-discipline way, then this should lead to more effective delivery of its business plan and ultimately more effective sustainable outcomes for the North Staffordshire area.

The structure of the training programme with its blend of masterclasses, study site visits and action-learning sets is also seen as a potential model that other areas could benefit from.

Lessons Learned

The concept of basing a training programme on a cross departmental group of 'regeneration champions' is a useful model to work with. It provides the opportunity of developing a group with mixed backgrounds, mixed experience and a mixed age group. All of these factors together are conducive for 'out of silo' thinking.

In the case of RegenWM the selection process for the 'regeneration champions' probably lacked sufficient engagement and explanation at the start. There should have been a greater preparation phase for the participants with a clearer launch event. Because this

was missing participants remained confused and uncertain about the programme for longer than expected.

The best bit of advice for running a similar learning programme is to engage beneficiaries right at the start in the process of defining the learning programme and helping to shape some of the learning toolkits.

Finally within a one year programme, there is a need to 'hit the ground running'!

Reference

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<http://www.regenwm.org/>

Project Images

