

Examining the 'power' in community empowerment: dialogue with the GoWell Panel and Community Health Exchange (CHEX)

Summary

Co-hosted by the GoWell Panel and the Community Health Exchange (CHEX), this interactive workshop took was an opportunity to discuss the role of power in everyday community empowerment and social regeneration.

GoWell and a Panel of 18 residents from its study areas formed an empowering knowledge exchange to share evidence on regeneration and strengthen our mutual understandings of the potential influence of neighbourhood renewal on wellbeing. A further intention was that the increased capability developed by Panel members would strengthen the capacity of their local community groups.

Evidence emerged from process that Panel members found this knowledge exchange empowering that it had benefits to the ongoing social regeneration of their local communities. As Panel members were supported to apply learning from this process with their local groups, their insights also contributed to a collaborative animation between NHS Health Scotland and the Glasgow Centre for Population Health about the role of [power as a health and social justice issue](#). Within the workshop there was an opportunity to watch this animation and participate in a facilitated discussion with the GoWell Panel and CHEX about community empowerment.

CHEX developed the Panel's public speaking skills as a means to share their learning from the knowledge exchange with local groups and 80+ delegates at the CHEX national conference. CHEX supports and promotes community development approaches to health improvement. They provide support to a network of community-led health initiatives and their public sector partners who are tackling health inequalities in communities across Scotland.

Facilitators

David Reilly, Development manager, CHEX, and Cat Tabbner, Community engagement manager, GoWell.

Delegates

Andrew	Fraser	GoWell Steering Group Chair
Anne	McMillan	GoWell Panel Member
Carine	Gordon	GoWell Panel Member
Deborah	Hamilton	The ALLIANCE
Donna	Henderson	GoWell Panel Member
Donna	McKenzie	GoWell Panel Member
Eddie	Donnachie	GoWell Panel Member
Eilidh	Lamb	Glasgow Kelvin College
Elsbeth	Kerr	Glasgow City Council
Fiona	McGovern	Ardenglen Housing Association
Jackie	Speirs	GoWell Panel Member

Jean	Donnachie	GoWell Panel Member
John	Walsh	Glasgow Housing Association, Unity Homes
Kelda	McLean	Glasgow Centre for Population Health
Lesley	Sweeney	GoWell Panel Member
Marie	Cawley	GoWell Panel Member
Suzanne	Glennie	NHS Greater Glasgow & Clyde

Aim

Facilitators and delegates agreed the purpose of the workshop:

an opportunity to discuss the role of power in everyday community empowerment and social regeneration

Foundation stones

Introductions were made and delegates were encouraged to connect up by speaking to the person next to them and describing their community/ies.

We are all part of a community:

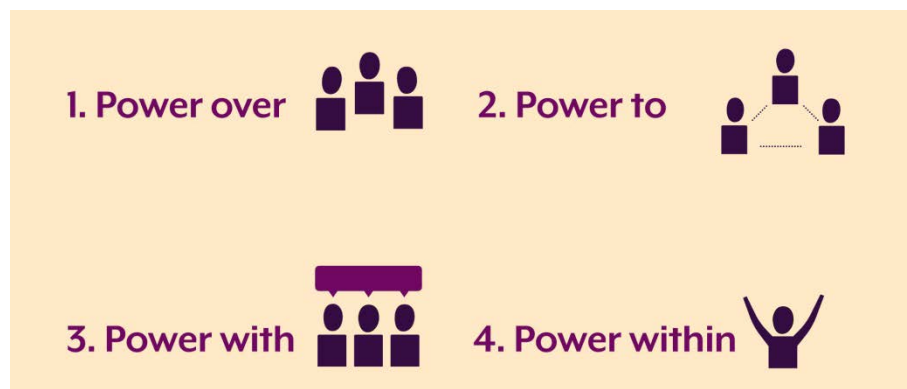
- Geographical: where we live, where we are from.
- Our interests: religion, our politics, sports team, as parents.
- Our identity: what is intrinsic to us, race, sex, sexual orientation.

Exercise: what is power?

Clips featuring definitions of power from [Power as a Health and Social Justice Issue](#) were shown for two discussion items:

- Self-organise to discuss: in your lives, what do you understand by Power?
- Four types of power (see Figure 1 below) and the especial importance of 'power with' to community empowerment and the obvious links with 'power within'.

Figure 1: Power as a Health and Social Justice Issue



Reflecting our experience

[Power as a Health and Social Justice Issue](#) features an explanation of power as a fundamental cause of health inequalities. Delegates were invited to think about how we can start to address health inequalities by sharing power, i.e.: better services and decision making by, for example co-production and Participatory Budgeting.

Collating our key lessons

A key lesson for CHEX's has been:

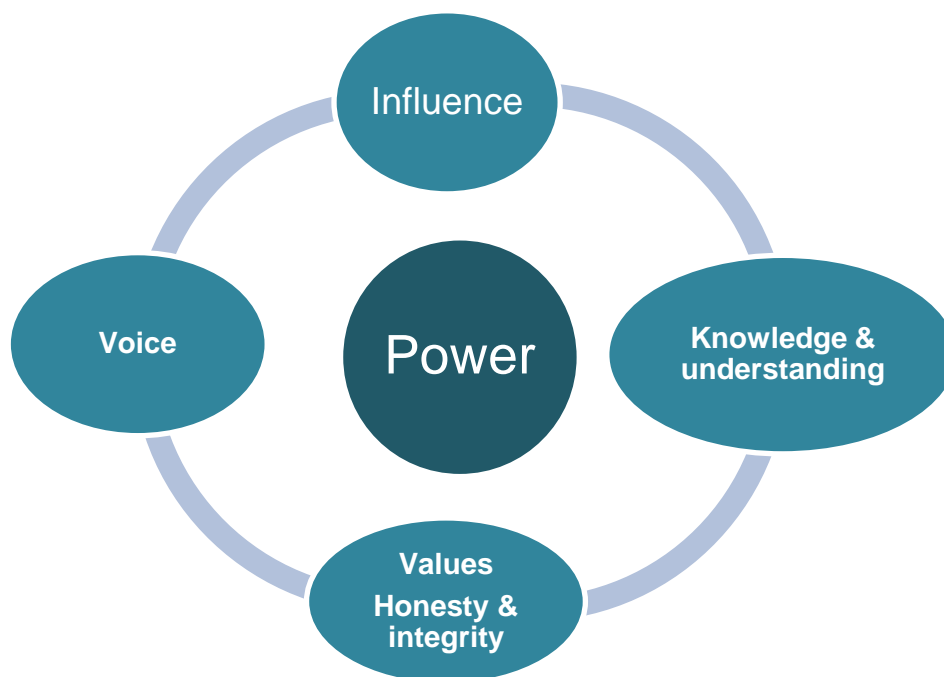
Addressing power inequalities is a key part of addressing health inequalities. All communities have skills, talents and capacities which should be invested in, recognised and respected. Some need more support than others.

A key lesson from the GoWell Panel has been: while empowerment outcomes can be specific, there were a set of common characteristics which contributed to their experiences of community empowerment.

In your experience what has been your key lesson in empowering communities?

Delegates self-organised into groups and noted down some of their key lessons in the work they undertake to empower communities.

One group described power as a “small word” with a big meaning and described how they broke it down into four approaches that they used to empower communities:



Another group record the importance of listening to other people's views and making sure that people in positions of authority are also listening. They also especially highlighted how they thought empowerment related to individuals and groups:

“Individual empowerment is important but collective power is more recognised and influential”

Values continued to be an important theme in the group's key lessons, particularly also in relation to human rights:

- Values, beliefs and morals have to align – informed by a human right-based approach
- Power and its uses are polarized dependant on the context

- Everybody has a right to say, no matter if it is right or wrong
- Human rights approach to service provision can improve and redress power balances

Lastly, the complexity of power was noted, especially the power of ‘influence’ which delegates thought could be good or bad because influence that empowers others is good for both the ‘empowerer’ and the ‘empoweree’.

Conclusion

On reflection, many of the discussion themes echoed the GoWell Panel’s experience of community empowerment and personal growth. One Panel member in particular referred to the infographic they co-designed with GoWell (see Figure 1 below) and exclaimed “this is everything I’m doing now”. A longer account of the GoWell Panel will be provided in a GoWell Briefing Paper (soon to be published). A toolkit will also be published on the GoWell website which will consist of reports from the Panel learning workshops and resources which describe in depth our methods used to carry out this work.

Figure 2: community empowerment outcomes reported by the GoWell Panel.



The full version of *Power as a health and social justice issue* can be accessed here: <http://www.healthscotland.scot/health-inequalities/fundamental-causes/power-inequality>

Sincere thanks and acknowledgement go to the GoWell Panel members and CHEX.