

East Midlands Improvement and Efficiency Partnership



Second World War history brings equality and diversity lessons to life for Newark and Sherwood District Council ▾



Training underway with Aegis Communities

Senior Managers “moved” by innovative Holocaust-based training ▾

More than 400 members of staff from Newark & Sherwood District Council have experienced unique training to help change the way they think about, and approach, equality and diversity within the organisation.

Following an intense and powerful training event designed by the Council in conjunction with Aegis Communities for senior managers based on experiences from the Holocaust, Newark & Sherwood

District Council has now adapted this training to cascade to all its full-time and part-time employees to tackle very specific equality and diversity issues.

“Having struggled with equality and diversity training in the past, we were astounded by the different approach Aegis Communities brought to this kind of training. Using the impact of the Holocaust and the history of genocide as the basis of the training

made everyone in the room sit up and think about their own behaviour and actions, as well as that of a collective organisation. The training was a very powerful experience. So often training is forgotten about when the day-to-day reality of working life sets back in

but with inspirational training like this, the opposite has in fact been true.”

Andrew Muter

Chief Executive

Newark & Sherwood District Council

Diversity in Newark & Sherwood ▾

Newark & Sherwood District Council serves a relatively small population of approximately 112,000, spread over a rural area. The majority of the population clusters around the town of Newark-on-Trent. In recent years the area has seen an increase in migrant workers, particularly from Poland, as well as growing traveller communities, each with their own individual cultures, making Newark & Sherwood the fifth most diverse community within Nottinghamshire.

It had been more than three years since the Council had undertaken Equalities and Diversity training on an organisation-wide scale. However, the updating of the Equalities Act in 2010 heralded a need for ‘refresher’ training to be implemented. This time round

the Council wanted to bring a totally different perspective to the training, to truly engage people in the subject and make it relevant to their everyday working lives, rather than merely ‘ticking the box’. Specifically, the Council wanted to achieve three key outcomes. These were to:

1. Stimulate, in all staff of Newark and Sherwood District Council, awareness about the importance of equality, and the consequences of discrimination and prejudice.
2. Stimulate a critical thinking process in relation to equality.
3. Encourage participants to consider: What am I going to do differently?

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A unique approach ▾

To provide a completely new approach to the training, the Council commissioned Aegis Communities, a community-interest organisation representing several charities including The Holocaust Centre, based near Newark. The Holocaust Centre has been in existence for 15 years and is unique, being the only centre dedicated to the holocaust in the UK.

The Holocaust Centre promotes an understanding of the roots of discrimination and prejudice and uses genocide as a model to show how society can break down. Aegis Communities takes all the learnings and experiences from the work of the Holocaust Centre to deliver transformational training tailored to public and private sector organisations, as well as the voluntary sector and charities.

Equality from the top down ▾

The initial training programme devised by the Council in conjunction with Aegis was a half-day session delivered to the Council's senior management team, hosted at The Holocaust Centre. The entire team of 30 attended the session, no mean feat given their busy schedules.

After mapping out the local community, including all of the different races, religions, age profiles and cultures, speakers were introduced who had experienced discrimination first-hand, to help bring the topic to life in a very real and personal way. One of the speakers was a Holocaust survivor. Whilst there is no doubt as to the impression this

left on the attendees, in order to achieve the objective of making it relevant to everyday life, another speaker was invited from Rainbow who had previously worked with the Council's Leisure and Culture Group.

Not only did the speakers have moving stories of what they had experienced at the hands of others, but they also spoke about how it had impacted on the rest of their lives. One of the main messages was that very small things can lead to something much bigger, a theory that can be visualised with a 'Discrimination Pit'. For example, the Holocaust survivor said that the very first experience she remembered of discrimination

was of other children ostracising her in the playground on the instructions of their parents. It may seem small, but frighteningly, the Discrimination Pit maps how it is a relatively short process to move from these isolated incidents to mass genocide.

Sue Kimber, Personnel & Training Officer for Newark & Sherwood District Council said:

“The training specifically avoided telling employees what is ‘right and wrong’, and aimed to take them on a journey to make their own decisions. One of the key experiences from the Holocaust was that people followed one another without questioning and thinking for themselves, and this understanding is at the heart of critical thinking development in Equalities training. Hearing from a Holocaust survivor was incredibly powerful

and moving. People were completely transfixed and mesmerised and it made everyone in the room think differently.”

Once attendees had listened to both the theory and the emotive first-hand experiences, the session then grounded this new awareness back into the reality of everyday working life. Café-style workshops saw groups of approximately 10 people discuss examples of discrimination closer to home, for example the highly publicised Fiona Pilkington case in Leicestershire, as well as a Polish store in Newark which had its windows repeatedly broken. Discussion took place as to what they would have done in these instances, as well as how Equalities and Diversity policies could be delivered through their own individual service plans.

Cascading training through the organisation ▼

The next step was to roll out this inspirational training programme through to the rest of the permanent employees within the Council. To date, approximately 400 people have received this training. Front-line workers were identified as being a priority, as they deal with the community on a day-to-day basis.

The original training programme was tailored to make it relevant to

this wider audience. For example, the training took place in-house and was shorter in order to better suit most people’s working commitments and therefore ensure as many people attended as possible. A quiz was compiled and a film, ‘Them and Us, Then and Now’ shown plus a Holocaust survivor speaking in person. The testimony of the Holocaust survivor focused more on how hard it is to integrate as a refugee

in another country, as many of the Council's front line staff deal with communities which have their own culture and values.

David King, Technical Officer from the Environmental Services department at Newark & Sherwood District Council, attended the training and said of it:

"I was completely blown away by the training. It was something completely different, which made me question all my values."

A third adaptation of the training was also created for those Council workers who perhaps work unpredictable shift patterns, for example the waste management team. It was recognised that it would be unrealistic to ask them to come in for a training session

after a very early shift start, so a shorter two-hour training package has been designed in a 'pub quiz' format to help bring the issues to life for them. For example, one of the questions used was around the number of professional women's football teams, thereby questioning gender stereotypes as well as racial and cultural differences.

In the near future, it is also hoped that the training can be cascaded to part-time employees of the Council. It is unrealistic to hold group sessions for someone who, for example, may take a one-hour fitness class per week for the Council and therefore this training will be cascaded down through the line managers who have attended one of the longer sessions.

Not just 'ticking the boxes' ▾

Of paramount importance to Newark and Sherwood District Council was that the training made a tangible difference to the daily lives of its employees and the organisation as a whole. Feedback from the initial training workshops demonstrated that many employees had identified the gypsy traveller community within the District as one about which they had preconceptions, or even, very little understanding at all.

Therefore training was applied almost immediately to understand and align differences of opinion about the gypsy and traveller community. Through an existing project run between Nottinghamshire County Council and the NHS, the Gypsy Traveller Health Ambassadors project, five Ambassadors from the gypsy traveller community, two of whom lived in Newark & Sherwood agreed to take part.

The format was a ‘speed dating’ style event where attendees could move from table to table asking any questions they liked of the gypsy and traveller representatives to try and better understand them and their needs. The questions posed to the representatives were across a broad range of subjects including education, transitions, employment and benefits. Approximately 40 Council representatives took part, most of whom were from relevant front line services departments, including Planning Enforcement.

The training had a number of benefits. Not only did employees at Newark & Sherwood gain a deeper understanding of the gypsy and traveller community, it opened links with this community and there is now a contact in place should it be needed in the future. A similar

initiative is now being planned with the Eastern European community.

“By working with Aegis Communities and using their unique genocide model I believe we created a truly memorable training experience, which didn’t just tick the boxes and has been utilised in reality throughout the organisation. The work that we have done since to train staff about the gypsy and traveller community is a great example of what we have learnt from the training and how we have moved it forward. I am incredibly grateful to Aegis Communities for working alongside us to develop such a worthwhile training day.”

Sue Kimber
Training & Personnel Officer
Newark and Sherwood District
Council



Attentive attendees at the training

Lessons for the future ▾

The training undertaken by Newark & Sherwood District Council, which drew on lessons from our recent past, has also given us lessons for the future of Equalities training:

1. Equalities training constantly needs reinventing. This particular training was so impactful because it was so different and unexpected. Taking lessons from history and applying them to issues surrounding our immediate communities can have a huge impact.
2. Whilst the Holocaust as a topic had huge resonance, it is vital to bring Equality and Diversity training back to people's everyday jobs, to truly make a difference to the way people work.
3. The fundamental training messages can be delivered to a huge audience, as long as they are tweaked to make it relevant to each audience.
4. The training team at Newark & Sherwood District Council don't believe it would have the same impact if repeated. The first few sessions of this training were the most successful as the angle was unexpected and really made people bring down their barriers. The success of these sessions

was evident in the amount of 'buzz' around them, however, this created expectations for future sessions, which potentially reduced the impact of the training itself.

5. Having an established route into more isolated communities is vital to truly understand their perspective. The gypsy traveller workshops worked exceptionally well because of the already-established relationship via the Gypsy Traveller Health Ambassador Project. The Eastern European workshop is proving harder to facilitate, as there is no direct link already in place.

"The work that we did for Newark and Sherwood District Council was incredibly rewarding for everyone involved. It was very innovative, forward thinking and brave of the council training team to commission such powerful training within their organisation and I am delighted that it has been used and implemented – it seems to have really paid off."

Helen Whitney
Aegis Communities

Link to Newark & Sherwood District Council feedback video
<http://vimeo.com/13854440>

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