

The Process for Local Wellbeing Networks Listening and Social Action Campaigns

LISTENING – CONNECT – ORGANISE - POWER

Why Listening Is Important

We listen for three things:

- What do people really care about?
- What do people want to do about it?
- And are there someone who is prepared to take the lead?

Listening is one of the fundamental components of the Community Organising Framework. It is not consultation, but it does give us valuable insight into our community. We find out about what is really going on beneath the surface. We hear powerful stories of people's lives. We find out what people love about where they live and what they are angry about. We uncover real problems that need addressing and explore the possibilities for change. We find leaders and we challenge people.

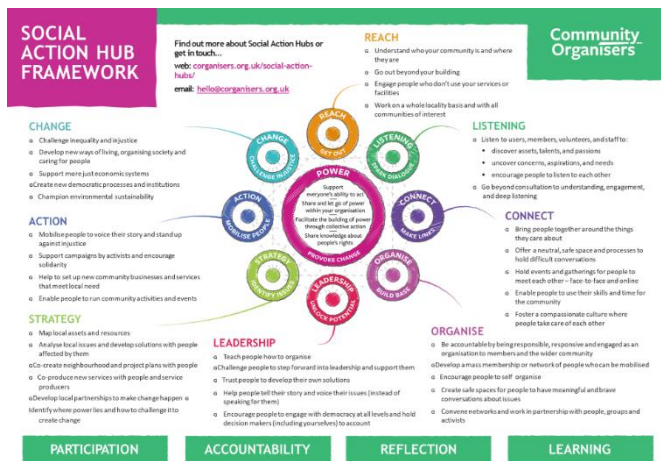
Connecting

As we listen we start to connect people together. We want people to start to listen to each other and so we create opportunities for that to happen. We invite people to meet up in small groups to talk about the things that matter to them. We ask them to tell their stories.

When people start to connect in this way they begin to come up with their own ideas for change. We then start to link up the groups and to bring them together, breaking down barriers and building bridges. We help people to have good conversations in which everyone has a chance to speak, to tell their stories and to put forward their ideas. We can't agree on everything. So, we look for what we can agree on and what we can work on together to create change for good.

Organise

To really make change takes persistence and our people power. If enough people come together we can change anything, but they need to be organised and to work together well.



The belief in democracy is a belief in sharing power and that means working together in ways that are democratic and cooperative. By listening to our residents and reaching out and connecting with people we will grow enough people power to make a change. This is called 'building a base'. When the base is strong it can really push for change through the power of numbers. They can get things done themselves that need doing.

Power

At the root of community organising is a deep understanding of power. The LWNs work to empower residents. Power in this case is defined as "the ability to act". Community organising provides the means for individuals and communities who feel powerless to collectively act. By learning what it means to be powerful and to act in solidarity with each other is the way that change happens. This is democracy in action.

Organising effective Listening and Social Action Campaigns

What is a Listening Campaign?

A listening campaign is a focused effort to embed the community organising approach in identifying concerns and priorities in a specific place, organisation or community of interest. It is accomplished through facilitated 1:1 listening conversations or small group meetings.

These meetings last for up to an hour. They are face-to-face, online or, by telephone conversations in which people share their own stories with the facilitator. They help those involved to better understand perspectives and experiences and gain a shared picture of life in the community. This approach can pick up on new trends as well as being invaluable as a crisis and issues management tool.

Define objectives

What are we really trying to do? And who are we really trying to reach? The depth to which we can be defined will set up the campaign with an appropriate degree of specificity. Knowing who and what are being listened for. Once the answers to these questions have been agreed, focused intelligence can be gathered and productive insights developed going forward.

Consistency

One of the biggest values of the intelligence that comes from social listening is that it is always on. You can continuously listen and, in turn, optimise your efforts. Listening for a moment in time, or for a campaign, gives you a singular snapshot, but it's only that. A conversation that is happening at a point in time. Set up the listening so it constantly feeds into the campaign.

This can be done by multiple methods, including:

- Searching specific keywords on social media to see how the public is referencing them
- Analysing data through email enquiries
- Using Google Trends for data on trends

- Conducting study groups

The Local Wellbeing Networks (“LWNs”) Listening and Social Action Campaigns will also closely follow the Participatory appraisal approach. This approach prioritises the views and attitudes of local people, as experts in their own community.

What is a Social Action Campaign?

A vital aspect of continuing to engage and listen to underrepresented community groups and residents is finding out the issues they experience and how they are impacted by these experiences. We do this by listening carefully to ascertain what matters most to them and their role as authors of the solutions to these issues.

By 31 July 2024 we will listen to 500 people from underrepresented communities in Islington, developing our LWNs and [Local Action Groups](#) (“LAGs”) across the borough. We will reach out and listen to those who are on the margins and underrepresented in decision making to develop a shared mandate(s) which we can collectively organise around.

The listening campaign will surface the stories and lived experience of underrepresented communities. Helping to identify common themes and wider issues that are concerning people. It will highlight issues for action or change on a local/hyper local level.

These stories will be used to inform the development of LAGs and the LWNs. LAGs will advance the collective solidarity that people need to feel, to be able to act together in effecting change and engage with those in positions of power. Thereby, ensuring the voices of those seldom heard can influence the policies and processes that affect their lives.

Social Action and the Participatory Appraisal Approach

The Participatory Approach is a methodology and set of techniques used in various fields, including community development, social research, and environmental planning. It is designed to engage community members and stakeholders in a collaborative and inclusive process to gather information, assess needs, and make decisions. The primary goal of participatory appraisal is to empower individuals and communities by giving them a voice in decision-making processes that affect their lives. Here are some key aspects and techniques associated with participatory appraisal:

1. **Community Involvement:** Participatory appraisal emphasises the active involvement of community members and stakeholders throughout the process. It values local knowledge and perspectives, recognising that those who live in a particular community often have the most insight into its challenges and opportunities.
2. **Qualitative Data Gathering:** It relies heavily, though not exclusively, on qualitative research methods, such as interviews, and focus group discussions. These methods help gather rich and context-specific information. See [Share Success Stories](#)
3. **Data Analysis:** The data collected through participatory appraisal is typically analysed collaboratively with the community or stakeholders involved. This can lead to a shared understanding of issues and potential solutions.
4. **Empowerment:** By involving community members in decision-making and problem-solving processes, participatory appraisal aims to empower them to take control of their own development and make informed choices.
5. **Action Planning:** Participatory appraisal identifies community needs and priorities. This information is then used to develop LAGs and LWNs Action Plans, projects, or policies that address these issues in a way that is relevant to the community.

The approach/model we are developing is:

- Designed to enable local people to identify solutions to issues facing the community.
- It provides a mechanism for them to establish positive relationships with key service providers.
- It allows them to remain actively involved in the planning, delivery and monitoring of these solutions. See [VSO Facilitator Guide to Participatory Approaches](#)

The LWNs 13 Steps to Organising a Listening and Social Action Campaign

- Step 1 – Build a listening team and identify your community
- Step 2 – Create a List of questions to gather information
- Step 3 – Choose Engagement Methods
- Step 4 – Consider Safety
- Step 5 – Practice with “Warm’ Contacts”
- Step 6 – Do It!
- Step 7 – Record Responses
- Step 8 – Collect contact details
- Step 9 – Collaborative data analysis
- Step 10 – Issue Prioritisation – How will the community be mobilised around the issues
- Step 11 – Action Planning – See * below
- Step 12 – Keep Listening and keep analysing
- Step 13 – Reporting and dissemination

***Action planning**

- Agree who will do what by when
- Think “How will the community be mobilised around the issue(s)
- What resources will be needed?
- When and where will the Action Group next meet for updates on the Action Plan?
- At each meeting of the Action Group a person is nominated to write up the notes and circulate them to the group

When will the Listening and Social Action Campaign start?

From July 2023 experienced Community Organisers, local leaders, and volunteers all of whom have the requisite skills to listen successfully within their community will be upskilled in listening skills, data protection and safeguarding. Once the participants feel confident in the listening process they will reach out and connect to those communities whose voices are seldom heard. Organisation will then take place around the issues that emerge. Empowering people to continue working on these issues at a local/hyper local level.

Final Thoughts

The LWNs Listening and Social Action Campaigns have the potential to shake up local democracy in Islington through the development of LAGs which can harness the creative energy and talent of Islington to create a collective decision-making space that people will actually enjoy being part of.

The whole idea of the Community Organisers programme is to enable a shift away from dependency on old politics with service providers towards one where residents, people who live in communities, have agency to act because they’re organised effectively, and so are able to engage in the democratic process effectively. The LWNs and LAGs are mechanisms through which this shift can take place.

The LAGs are intended to be a space where people from the local community will come together to provide a forum to scrutinise local service providers such as the police. Perhaps eventually making decisions on the allocation of grant funding for the local area.

The development of the LAGs will be steered by a core team of Community Organisers and Community Change Makers, who are involved in the recruiting and training of local people. They will encourage residents to take part in the [Introduction to Community Organising](#) one day training course which will provide them with the initial skills needed to become Community Organisers.

Important decisions affecting their community, their children, their schools, the services they use and their quality of life generally shouldn't just be left to be made by officials who have a limited view of what it's like to actually live their lives.

Interesting link: <https://www.acorntheunion.org.uk/>