

# IMPACT!

## Women Active in Community and Public Life

*“it was like opening a new book and as each page opened it was more interesting than the last*

IMPACT! is a flexible learning programme which spans 6 - 12 months. It is specifically for women and explores issues around power, participation and leadership. It is about ...

*“... being a citizen - looking at your own life and other people’s lives - trying to make life better for everyone and understanding the rights and responsibilities of being a citizen.*

*“... getting out there and doing something in the community*

## Who is it for?

IMPACT! isn’t just a training course - it is about offering women the opportunity to be part of a network that can offer encouragement, skill-sharing, information and support to each other.

*“Everyone boosted each others confidence by telling their own experiences and listening to each other*

Women come to IMPACT! from all walks of life. This is essential to an approach which is about sharing experiences and challenging each others’ assumptions. Some women haven’t been out of their own homes for years because of illness, disability or a lack of personal confidence. Others have just left College or University, have retired from paid employment, are local Councillors, volunteers, carers ...

*“As a group of women we were able to share the richness of our lives irrespective of socio-economic status, faith, sexual orientation, age, ethnicity, disability, colour, creed, profession etc.*

*“Irrelevant of our backgrounds - every single woman had some sort of inspiration in life - some sort of goal*

# What IMPACT! looks like

IMPACT! begins with a taster session where tutors and past participants offer a flavour of the content and style of the programme. Then the 6 month programme begins:

	Saturday sessions	Weekend residential	Events & field trips	Assignments & support
Assistance with childcare & transport, accessible venues, small group work, support, safe environment for discussion and sharing. Encouraging a wide diversity of women to attend - with this mix being essential to sharing experiences and recognising common issues. There are between 2 and 4 tutors at all times to allow for small group and individual support.	Why participate? What does citizenship mean for us?  Human Rights Power & powerlessness  Presentation skills  Democracy & decision making How laws are made in the UK  How to influence decisions Consultation tools & techniques  Politics & everyday life Meetings - how to make sure they work for you Networking  Politics in Europe  Action planning	Citizenship Decision making Assertive communication Capturing confidence  Diversity, difference & citizenship Leadership - skills & qualities	<i>Participants are encouraged and supported to attend appropriate and relevant events taking place nationally. Wherever possible they are provided with opportunities to speak to influential people - politicians, Ministers etc.</i>  Visit to the House of Parliament - arrangements to meet women MPs  Visit to Brussels - European parliament - arrangements to meet women MEPs	<i>Tutorials, assignment support, option for accreditation are offered. Women keep diary sheets.</i>  Assignment: Citizenship & Human Rights  Assignment: Democracy & decision making

# Why women?

*“Women are influential members of family and community life*

*“We have the same kind of issues no matter what our background or culture. We are seen as home-makers and have doubts about ourselves achieving any bigger ambitions*

*“We discovered that all the women on the course had suffered the same sort of inequalities and barriers*

- ⇒ Lack of self confidence
- ⇒ Lack of qualifications
- ⇒ Doing things for everyone else and not for myself
- ⇒ Not being able to articulate properly
- ⇒ Depression
- ⇒ Isolation
- ⇒ Lack of knowledge and opportunity
- ⇒ Childcare issues
- ⇒ Not being listened to
- ⇒ Lack of transport and inaccessibility of venues
- ⇒ People assuming things about women because of their culture
- ⇒ Not being taken seriously
- ⇒ Lack of support from employers
- ⇒ Caring responsibilities
- ⇒ Cost involved
- ⇒ Financial dependence on others
- ⇒ Male dominated meetings



It is predicted that it will take:

- **20 years** to achieve equality in civil service top management
- **40 years** to achieve an equal number of senior women in the judiciary
- **Up to 200 years** - another 40 elections - to achieve an equal number of women in Parliament

*(Equal Opportunities Commission 2006 survey of women's representation in positions of power)*

A record number of women are serving in parliaments around the world but they still account for only 16% of all lawmakers  
*(Inter-Parliamentary Union annual report card, 2006)*

8% of funding for New Deal programmes go to lone parents, of whom 95% are female. Yet 57% of funds go to young people, of whom only 27% are female  
*(Women's Budget Group, 2004)*

- More women than men live in poverty on deprived estates and women in general have lower incomes than men
- While women are the majority in community groups, they are under-represented when it comes to being in decision-making positions
- Women are the biggest client group within the social rented housing sector  
*(ReGender - Oxfam, UK Poverty Programme)*

# The wider context - now and for the future

The government wants:

**Active citizens** - to have a say in the decisions that affect their lives

**Citizenship education** - social & moral responsibility, community involvement and political literacy

**Citizen engagement** - with the activities and institutions of government

**IMPACT!**

Women Active in  
Community & Public  
Life!

The Department for Communities and Local Government has made a specific commitment to considering the gender impact of all housing policies as part of its Diversity and Housing Action Plan



The government has set Public Service Agreement targets for Gender Equality, including increasing the number of women appointed to public bodies to 40% and, by 2008:

- 37% of the Senior Civil Service to be women
- 30% of top management posts to be filled by women

## Background

The IMPACT! learning experience grew out of a women's health project. It evolved from a series of workshops which soon expanded to include a programme of training, practical support and mentoring for women. The first accredited 'course' of this type began in January 2000. It focused on women's own experiences and opinions whilst setting out to explore local, national and European decision making structures.

The success of this pilot course led to further development around the main topics of citizenship, democracy, leadership and participation and an invitation by the Home Office Active Learning for Active Citizenship (ALAC) programme to showcase the IMPACT! approach as a creative learning initiative (2004-6).

ALAC provided opportunity and resources for IMPACT! to be developed further and delivered by a partnership comprising: Fircroft College, Wolverhampton Asian Women & Diabetes Group, GATE and Working for Change. Under ALAC, women from the West Midlands took part in IMPACT!

*"it has made me feel alive again, it has opened up arenas that I quite possibly never thought I'd be able to sit in - let alone speak in*

# What women, communities and public life have gained

*“it opened my life to new opportunities and encouraged me to take risks that I would never have done had I not enrolled on the course*

*“I believe I can change things*

Participants now have increased levels of confidence, skills and knowledge

Women are more knowledgeable and politically aware

*“I have a thirst for knowledge now and the desire to do further research*

*“I am able to speak at forum meetings without feeling embarrassed*

*“it raised questions about democracy and the current voting system and arguments around ‘first past the post’ and ‘proportional representation’ systems*

*“the residential and the trip to Brussels gave us a chance to break down barriers and get rid of preconceptions of women from other cultures*

*“ I was amazed that a woman of my age (73) can be of use to others*

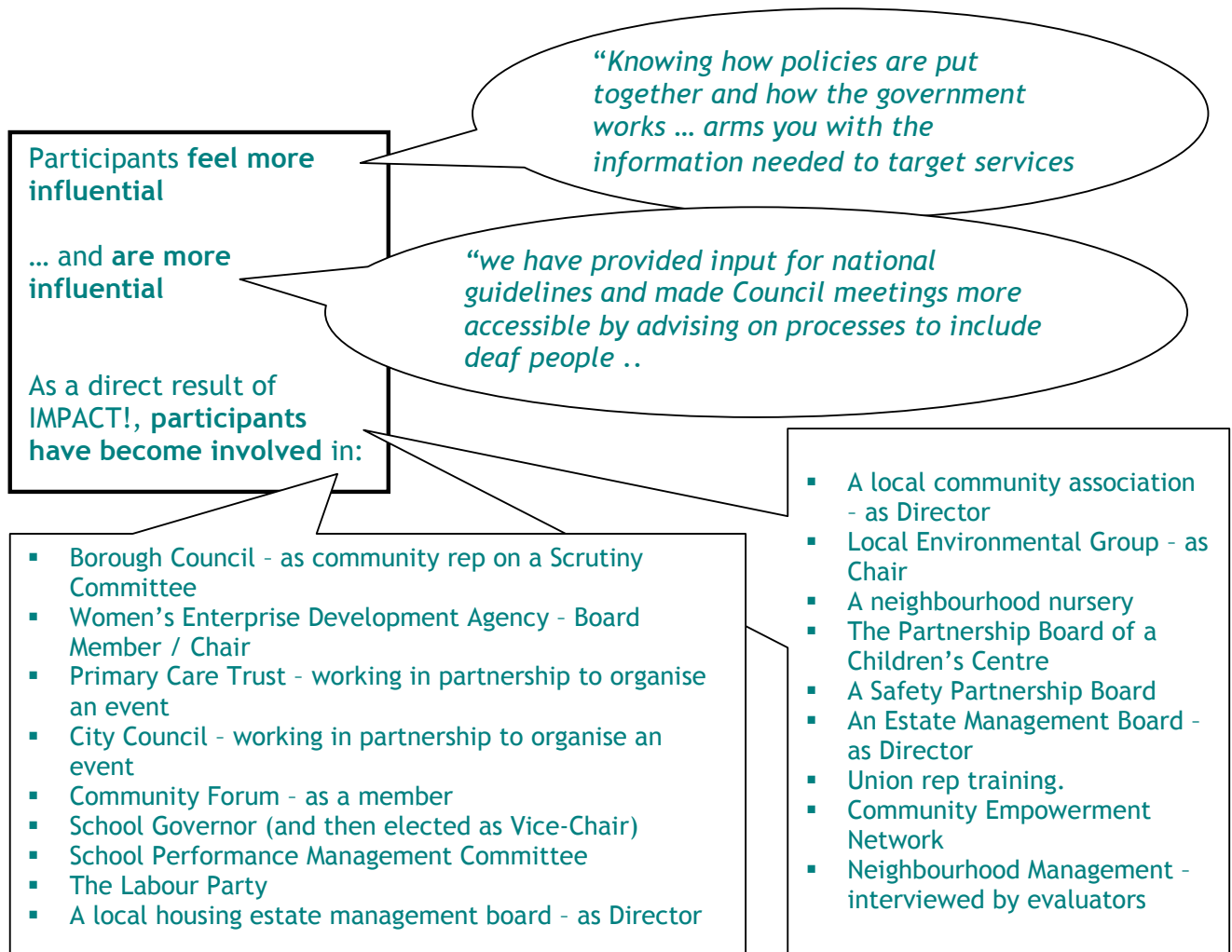
*“it made me think about how some groups cannot access normal rights*

Participants have learned more about themselves, their differences and collective experiences

... they have surprised themselves and challenged the barriers of discrimination

... they have a better understanding of others

*“I am no longer frightened to ask questions of others on subjects I would have tip-toed around before e.g. culture, religion, family*



And, in terms of wider Impact! on others:

*“my friends are really proud of me*

*“none of my children have stopped on at school except the younger one. After sitting and talking to her about what I have learnt and how it’s made me feel - seeing me at my age learning - it helps her to feel responsible for herself - make her own decisions - and she decided to stay at school*

*“I want to take my family to Brussels to share the same experience that I had and - in particular - to visit the European Parliament*

*“My daughter wants to be a politician!*

*“My husband is doing more volunteering and my grandchildren have more awareness of the world around them and the other people in it*

## Links to national policy

### Civil Renewal and Neighbourhood Governance

- Developing and supporting strong, active, and empowered communities, in which people are able to do things for themselves.
- People being active and having a say in the decisions that affect their lives.
- Recognising the need for people to develop the confidence to engage, further their understanding and learn new skills.
- Empowering citizens to work with public bodies to set and achieve common goals.
- Promoting community-led service provision to plan and deliver activities and programmes to meet local need.

*For example: Together We Can; Active Learning for Active Citizens; Firm Foundations; Local Area Agreements and Neighbourhood Charters*

### Community Cohesion

- People from all backgrounds to have opportunities to participate in civic society - to be active in their communities and engage with public services.
- Every citizen working together to build a society in which we can respect one another and communities can live in peace together.

*For example: Improving Opportunity, Strengthening Society and the Respect agenda*

### Sustainable Communities

- Promoting effective and inclusive participation to develop communities where people want to live and work, now and in the future.
- Providing a commitment to creating sustainable communities - thriving, well run, active, inclusive and safe places to live.
- Recognising social exclusion as the responsibility of all.

*For example: Local Vision information on Vibrant Local Leadership; Neighbourhood Renewal; Sure Start; Sustainable Community Strategies*

*“ .. nothing is impossible and if we try really hard we can attain any height!”*

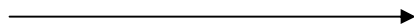
## A flavour of what women hoped for and what they got ...

To get to know more people and to get out of the house



I have influence on how my kids are looked after in school  
I feel confident that I can get people involved  
- to challenge and change structures

To learn more and become a better representative on the (Primary Care Trust) Forum



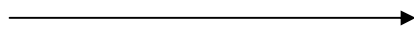
I have the skills, understanding and confidence to feel that I can help people and have a new lease of life in retirement. Family life is much richer

To meet other women and learn a little more about politics



I am confident in the knowledge that I can make a valuable contribution and make a difference. I feel far more in control

To get out of the house after 10 years of not leaving the house alone following an accident. I wanted to be involved in something



I now help others to build their confidence and realise their potential.  
I am planning to set up a Women's Enterprise Development Agency

To get confident as the 'powers that be' made me feel worthless, patronised - with no respect



I have the self confidence to enable change in my own life - to stand on my own two feet

**If you would like to know more about IMPACT!**

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*All the information, photographs and quotations contained within the report have come from participants and trainers who have taken part in the IMPACT! learning programme.*

Thank you to all those who took part.