

Engaging with people in disadvantaged communities

Introduction

This toolkit is based upon activities which took place in Southampton, UK as a part of the Tackling Social Exclusion (TSE) project. In Southampton, project staff worked with residents living in social housing estates. The aim of the activity was to make contact with residents, work with them to identify their barriers to services, and any issues they had related to training and employment.

The aim of the activity was to make contact with residents, work with them to identify their barriers to services

How can this toolkit help you?

This toolkit provides information and guidance related to the barriers which were identified. This toolkit can assist workers who undertake activities in the local community:





Below is a list of the most common issues that were identified and ways in which they could be tackled by those working in communities:

Finding work

- Find out the contact details and referral processes for any local employment services
- Find out how to get or renew copies of certificates for previous qualifications
- Refer to specialist local employment support services where appropriate (i.e. those specialising in disabilities)
- Identify any child care services available
- Access / download application forms for jobs
- Collect and regularly update a list of local job vacancies

Finding training

- Collect information on training providers and courses available in, or close to local area
- Organise or provide childcare to enable parents to attend courses
- Find out how to arrange disability or learning difficulty assessments in order to support residents who may have specific needs
- Find out if there is financial support available for transport to and from venues
- Provide materials to participants taking part in training (simple things such as paper & pens)
- Telephone or text residents the day before, or on the day that the training course starts to remind them its happening

Finding the right health service

- Have information available on relevant local health services such as health visitors, local surgeries and emergency services
- Be able to provide information on how to register for local doctors surgeries and NHS Dentists
- Provide access to a telephone to make appointments
- Be aware of specialist services that people may need to access (such as physiotherapy, occupational therapy, podiatry)

Money Advice/Debt problems

- Electricity and gas suppliers Have data on local suppliers available to help residents undertake price comparisons
- Be able to undertake eligibility checks for welfare benefits and help with applications if relevant
- Be able to provide contact details for local and national debt and welfare benefits advice services and support referrals
- Refer any examples of 'mis-selling' of mobile phone / fuel contracts or other goods to a consumer protection body (such as Trading Standards in the UK)
- Challenge company 'cold callers' causing a nuisance in an area
- Consider providing extra debt advice services in the area



General ways for preparing to work in the community

Before you go out into the community or begin to work directly with residents, gather the following information or think about how you can support residents.

- Put together a list of key local services and their contact details that can be given to residents to keep and use at home. (e.g. local council, social services, police etc)
- Take a mobile phone or have access to a phone line to enable residents to make calls to services or agencies while you are with them

But remember:

- Residents may not be able to afford to call this service on their own phone
- Many people won't take calls from non identified numbers (anonymous call barring), so dial 91470 and then the mobile number if calling from a UK office phone, or contact residents by mobile phone
- Check what services and agencies provide support to disadvantaged or low-income households. Have details of their customer services department and print information from the website

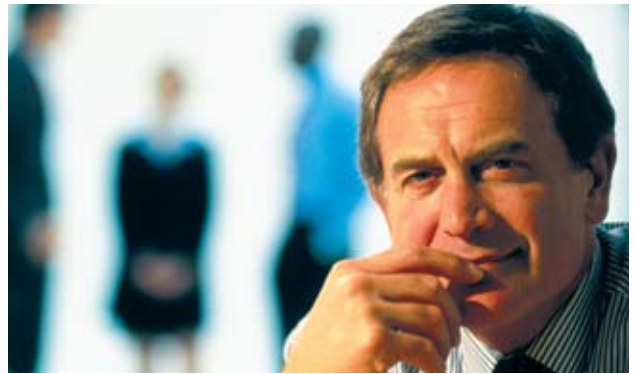
Be prepared to:

- Read and explain letters or leaflets sent by services or agencies to residents
- Go with residents to see agencies or support services especially when they are unfamiliar with the place or organisation
- Write on behalf of a resident to request action by an agency or service
- Find out if there are services that will help residents to complete official forms

When working in the community and seeking to engage with residents, key things to remember are:

- Be polite and respectful
- Ensure that you have your organisational identification with you. Give it to residents when you meet them so they can read and check it
- Always explain why you are there
- Consider the privacy and confidentiality of the resident. Have a quiet area where residents can talk things through away from neighbours or strangers
- Don't assume that people can read or write. Ask if the resident has something with their name and address written on it rather than asking them to spell things out or write it down

Remember to communicate patience and respect with your voice and facial expressions



If you are working with multilingual or disabled residents, then there are additional needs you should take into consideration in your approach. The checklist below highlights customer service improvements you can make

Advice on communicating with multilingual people:

The Basics – Speaking:

- Speak slowly with longer pauses: Speak as you normally would but add longer pauses so that the person has time to process or translate what you are saying
- Do not talk louder - just more slowly. They can hear you they may not be able to understand you
- Be patient - your customer may need time to find the right word
- Rephrase - don't just repeat yourself: Rephrase in clearer or simpler language - you weren't understood the first time, so try a different tactic
- Remember that repeating yourself can sound like impatience
- Speak in specific and simple English:
- Don't use jargon or idioms
- Avoid using contractions like "can't" because often the "n't" is not heard
- Focus on clear and simple nouns and verbs
- Learn to be comfortable with lack of eye contact when speaking. Some cultures do not make direct eye contact, this does not mean the customer is not attentive or cannot understand you

The Basics – Listening:

- Learn to tune your ear to other dialects and accents
- Don't be afraid to ask for clarification if you don't understand
- It's okay to ask your customer to speak more slowly so you can understand
- Remember to communicate patience and respect with your voice and facial expressions
- Don't say you understand someone when you truly don't
- Clarify what you think you have understood to make sure that your understanding is correct



Advice on assisting disabled customers:

- Disabled people are individuals just like everybody else. Don't make assumptions about their abilities or their needs
- Don't forget some disabilities are hidden, for example epilepsy and mental illness
- If you aren't sure how something might affect a disabled person or what assistance they need, ask them what is the best way you can help and/or their preferred method of communication
- If a disabled person is with someone, talk to the disabled person directly, not to the person who is with them. This also applies to a deaf person accompanied by a sign language interpreter
- When talking to a person who has a hearing impairment, find out (if necessary in writing) whether they lip-read. If they do, make sure your face is in the light, look directly at the person, speak clearly and naturally, remembering to keep your hands away from your face
- When you first meet a person with a sight impairment, introduce yourself
- When you are going to move away, tell them. Don't leave them talking to an empty space
- If you are taking money, check their payment before going to the till, count their change out loudly coin by coin as you place it in their hand
- When you are talking to someone with a speech impairment, concentrate on what is being said, be patient and don't try to guess what they want to say
- If you don't understand, don't pretend you do
- If someone has difficulty understanding you, be patient and be prepared to explain something more than once
- Concentrate on using simple language. Write down the main points of your meeting and any important details, like the date of the next appointment or documents they need to provide. Think about other ways of explaining what you want to convey
- Customers who have mobility difficulties may use sticks or crutches that make it harder to use their hands. This may make it difficult to sign something or receive documents or money. Always provide a seat and offer to help with coats, bags etc
- When talking to a wheelchair user, try to ensure that your eyes are at the same level as theirs, perhaps by sitting down. Don't lean on the wheelchair - it is part of the user's personal space
- People with a mental health problem can experience distress and confusion which may make everyday activities seem very difficult. Be patient, explain more than once if necessary, give them plenty of time to respond and make decisions
- If someone looks 'different', avoid staring. Concentrate on what they are saying, not on the way they look
- Allow more time than usual to complete the interview or tasks, if that is necessary, always be patient and don't rush

When guiding a blind person do not push or pull them. Ask if they would like to take your arm.

- Some disabled people may have difficulty in reading, understanding or signing forms. Never insist on a signature if the person is unsure. Ask if the customer wants to seek advice, write your name and number and suggest they think it over and speak to you another time. If it is urgent, ask if there is anyone who can assist and support them
- If someone looks as if they need assistance, offer it but wait for them to accept before you help
- When guiding a blind person do not push or pull them. Ask if they would like to take your arm. If there are any steps tell them whether the steps go up or down
- Remember that guide dogs for blind people, hearing dogs for deaf people and other assistance dogs, are working dogs, not pets. They should not be fed, patted or distracted when they are working
- Above all put yourself in the disabled person's place. Most of the above points are just good manners

