

# **Community Activism or Policy Implementation? Resident to Resident Learning in Neighbourhood Governance**

**Dr Derrick Purdue**

University of the West of England  
Faculty of the Built Environment  
Coldharbour Lane  
Bristol  
BS16 1QY  
England  
UK

Tel: +44 (0)117 328 3045

Email: [Derrick.Purdue@uwe.ac.uk](mailto:Derrick.Purdue@uwe.ac.uk)

Co-Authors: Angus McCabe and Mandy Wilson, Rose Ardon, Laura Braybrook and Liz Chilton

## **ABSTRACT**

Community activists accumulate a lot of knowledge of regeneration programmes and governance structures. While some have found a career path as paid workers in community or voluntary organizations, consultancy offers an innovative way of converting their cultural capital into wages by providing services rather than importing professional skills from outside of the neighbourhood. This paper is based on the evaluation of the Home Office / DCLG Guide Neighbourhood (GN) Programme, through which neighbourhood organizations in cities as diverse as London, Birmingham, Liverpool, Leicester, Hull and Plymouth, that have been successful in engaging with regeneration were encouraged to become consultants on the basis of their experiential knowledge of how regeneration works in deprived neighbourhoods and to mentor residents in other neighbourhoods, which were less established in neighbourhood governance. This process was called 'resident to resident learning'.

The Guide Neighbourhood Programme was developed in a policy context in which various government departments have recognized the importance and efficacy of action taken by local residents in regenerating their own neighbourhoods. In particular, the GN Programme built on the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister's Residents' Consultancy Pilots Initiative, which explored the extent to which residents' knowledge of their locality can be valuable and marketable to regeneration organizations, and their knowledge of regeneration valuable to residents in other neighbourhoods. The Treasury's Cross Cutting Review argued for an increased role for the Voluntary and Community Sector in delivering services, using their specialist knowledge of local clients to deliver holistic services, with a shift from grant funding towards service contracts. The Home Office also aimed to make sure that in each deprived neighbourhood there was a 'community anchor organization' to support and facilitate a wide range of (unfunded) community groups, which promote community cohesion and renewal of civil society.

In the paper, ideas drawn from policy implementation studies are used in the evaluation of the Guide Neighbourhood Programme and the role and sustainability of

the resident to resident learning model. The evaluation, undertaken by a consortium of Birmingham University, the University of the West of England and a consultancy, COGS, followed an action research model, which means that the evaluation team plays a developmental role as well as a research role, including running workshops at networking meetings as well as assessing the impact of the Guide Neighbourhoods on their clients through a survey and interviews. This type of co-production of knowledge and skills requires a delicate balance of capacity building and analysis.

**Key Words: implementation, learning, neighbourhood**