

Minutes Elder Farm Project – Meeting Gazelle Lounge -Wednesday 9 October 2013, 7pm (still to be ratified)

1. Present : Moira Bori, Chris Copleton, Gerry Halligan, Laurence Shields
2. Apologies : William, Yvonne, Alexander, Chris
3. It was noted again, that the group used to be a vibrant active community and that positive action is needed to bring folk in.
 - i. Several factors have reduced the community. Death, change of job/location, interference from authorities, and especially currently DWP universal rules and regulations, seem to have all affected members ability to come down and work in the garden. Which is confusing because new regs also seem to insist that while not working to find work, one should be working for the community, and surely that is what our project is all about

Currently DWP ask claimants to repeatedly prove they are seeking work, or face sanctions of benefit support. The pressure of all of this has cost our community dear.

It may be asked if imposition of sanctions have in general done more damage than good to communities everywhere, affecting as they do the finance and mental health, of community members, perhaps winning some saving, but costing more through implementation and resultant problems requiring NHS or government assistance

The current system seems to be inflexible and offers little room for mistakes and / or the conditions of being unemployed, disability, depression etc

Job Centre advisers claim that they have no authority to install sanctions, when in actuality many advisers have made a case for sanctions, which generates immediate suspension of benefits and hardship on families until that case is been reviewed, which can take weeks. In general, the condition of unemployment directly affects mental health and self confidence. Various coping mechanisms may be put in place. Lack of flexibility creates barriers where individuals do not fit an accepted norm, creating unnecessary stress and friction to all parties, affecting these same coping mechanisms even the ability to perform what are viewed as perfectly normal tasks.

It is unquestionably hard to face repeated hostility from those we try to serve. Experiences can sour service from time to time, as can personal issues. Extra pressure may not be the best way for effective performance

It is equally hard, if not harder, to face repeated rejection and a seeming constant reminder of failure in being able to provide for self and family, as applicants apply and are rejected time after time. Both sides lose ability to perform well, both sides lose confidence in themselves and the system.

Meanwhile suspension of benefits, by default requires the community, family, friends, many of whom are also struggling with finance, depression, disability, to support appellants in food, energy and rent for the duration of the suspension.

Many cases brought for decision, have affected the local community severely. When cases are dropped, and many are, there seems to be little compensation for injury. No apology, no financial recompense for errors on the part of DWP. Meanwhile, savings have been broken into or payments for bills suspended to help out family members and neighbours, and penalties incurred.

While many of us can budget, once the budget is broken, not many of us have the ability to put it right. Somehow the money spent is never reimbursed. When the conditions and the strict boundaries we have put in place to help us budget are broken, not many have the ability to get back on track. Somehow this activity of breaking budget rules in itself requires us to spend where normally we would be safely bunkered down and minding the pennies, added to which life happens, ie the fridge or washing machine breaks down

Many who lose benefits are in danger of becoming homeless. The cost of housing homeless individuals in hostels is often many many times greater than rented accommodation. Stress and concern to families and friends surely adds a further cost to our local services including police and NHS. Because many are not assisted to invest in a share within the private sector homelessness dips deep into the pockets of local authorities.

Sanctions have even been applied when claimants have been attending courses to improve on

skill sets, and there is a threat that any claimants working more than 16 hours per week on some voluntary community project such as our own, will be viewed to have failed to meet conditions of benefit and therefore under threat of sanctions, even though that work may increase confidence, self reliance, skill sets, understanding and experiences immediately transferable to the home or work environment, as well as providing a chance for a decent work reference which many claimants do not have. Some claimants suffer from corruption, bullying and company's failure to allow them to do their work properly and therefore do not have a previous decent work reference. No matter how successful the interview, lack of work reference will inevitably result in failure.

Our garden is supposed to offer an open space place where persons suffering from depression or oppression can exist without discrimination, or criticism, do some work and feel better for it, which, by default, asks members to defer from criticising or discriminating against each other, and it should be noted that we are so far none of us trained professionals in such matters, only people who care, but we do not cost the government so very much and try hard to be an asset to the community and work with local services

- ii. It may be worth considering asking other local groups if they have also experienced similar problems and together identify the issues and bring them to the attention of ministers who do not seem to understand the huge impact and eventual cost this brings to a community
 - iii. It is not known if the oncoming event of the Commonwealth Games has been an additional factor on our community, in as much as persons made homeless due to the taking over of land to build, or rumours that persons with issues have been relocated to areas away from Commonwealth Games areas, so as to not adversely affect any positive image of visitors to the games might take away with them
 - iv. We have plenty of tasks for all shapes and sizes, from sorting nails and screws, cleaning bricks, and sweeping up, to building walls, digging, barrowing, weeding, art work, repairing boxes, even just talking to the community and showing them round
4. A survey has been designed to send out to the community via the schools
- i. It was also suggested that members might be ready to set up a stand in and around Govan to invite folk to fill out the forms. It was also suggested that with permission, forms could be left in Housing Associations Receptions, Elderpark library, Pearce Institute and Day Centres / Nurseries We should ensure there is no duplication of data
 - ii. The questions and format of 3 forms were looked at and a simpler version decided on making font and pictures as large as possible
 - iii. Questions that previously encompassed several options in one ie community hub with workshop, café and facilities, have been divided up into separate options to make it clearer what is being voted for
 - iv. It was suggested that some of the Govan media might help out by advertising the survey
 - v. Another suggestion was to remember to send out to the local colleges as well
 - vi. Some did not like options offered
 - vii. Members were reminded that options had been offered by community members and the point of the survey is to mark options you like with Y and mark options you don't like with an X
5. Laurence and Chris have offered to help out with web admin