



Anti-Racist Action in Arts & Wellbeing 'Transformation Space: Words into Action' Workshop – Summary

This workshop was designed and delivered by [Equal Voices](#) in partnership with Flourishing Lives and the Anti-Racist Action Group (ARAG), aiming to explore how to embed equity as a foundation for collective change and centre diverse voices to shape a more inclusive future.

The core focus of the session was sharing the lived experiences and emotional and practical challenges faced by the members of Equal Voices in establishing their group and developing anti-racist work.

'Transformation Space: Words into Action' Workshop Summary

Key Learning 1: The Centrality of Lived Experience and Addressing Barriers

The fundamental challenge addressed by the workshop is moving anti-racist action **from words into action**. While many people have attended anti-racism training or workshops, turning that knowledge into practice is difficult due to psychological, systemic, social, and cultural barriers.

The core aims of Flourishing Lives and ARAG include ensuring that more groups like Equal Voices are formed and embedded across the sector, and that **lived experience voices are centred as the leaders of transformation** in arts and wellbeing.

- **Understanding Inequality:** The work seeks to raise awareness and understanding of the inequalities and barriers that racialised and minoritised people face, which prevent them from accessing arts and wellbeing services.
- **The Emotional Labour of Change:** Taking action involves overcoming significant emotional challenges. For those taking anti-racist action, this can involve bringing back past trauma. For white allies, it involves overcoming the fear and anxiety of taking the first step and not knowing how to start.
- **Challenging Institutional Practice:** Traditional methods of engagement (e.g., putting on events, sending blanket emails, expecting people to turn up) were noted as ineffective for engaging ethnically diverse populations. Organisations often focus on the "physical energy and the intellectual exercise of change" rather than the emotional side.

Key Learning 2: Methodology for Action – Prioritising Relationships and Time

The model demonstrated by Equal Voices contrasts sharply with conventional approaches, focusing heavily on **relationship building** and **sharing power**.

Conventional Council/Organisational Approach	Transformational / Relational Approach (Equal Voices)
Focus on Consultation ("tick box")	Focus on Building Relationships and Community Development
Pre-prepared agenda, plans, objectives	Open and organic approach with no set plan
General invitations (blanket emails)	Individual outreach (sent from the person, not the council/institution)
Meeting people you <i>want</i> to meet (based on agenda)	Meeting people where <i>they are at</i>

Core Principles of the Transformational Approach:

1. **Putting Relationships First:** Building genuine, deep, human connections is paramount.
2. **Sharing and Building Power:** This involves sharing the power held by institutional roles (like a council officer) and integrating the power of lived experience and creativity from community members. It is not about *giving up* power, but *building* power together.
3. **Listening:** Taking the necessary time to listen attentively, beyond just listening for what fits an existing agenda. This includes creating a **safe space** where individuals feel able to drop institutional restrictions and share their "real, raw" experiences.
4. **Collective Storytelling:** Moving away from individualist and hierarchical models (like a single TED talk) to a format of collective storytelling where all perspectives in the journey are heard.

Key Finding 3: Investment in Relationships Accelerates Action

The Equal Voices process demonstrated that high investment in relationships and listening significantly streamlined the "doing bit".

- **The Power of Slow Work:** A 3-hour strategy session consisted of approx. 2 hours and 48 minutes focused on getting to know each other, including a creative exercise for expressing cultural and diverse heritage.
- **Rapid Outcomes:** After the extensive relationship building, tangible actions could quickly be defined and agreed upon, including contributions to the Dacorum culture strategy, input into the Council's new EDI strategy, planning a workshop, and creating a logo.
- **Organisational Support:** Annie Smith and Diana Houghton (Dacorum Council) enabled this transformation space by allowing for a **parallel approach**, running the organic, relational work alongside conventional consultation methods, which helped manage external expectations and timescales.

Key Learning 4: Valuing Lived Experience and Reciprocity

Discussions highlighted that in an environment of anti-racist action, the relationship between organisations (often salaried) and community experts (often struggling activists or artists) must be addressed, particularly regarding compensation and value.

- **Financial Recognition:** Lived experience is a form of expertise, acquired through experiencing inequality or discrimination, and people should not be expected to potentially re-traumatise themselves for free. Offering payment puts a **value** on that experience and acts as a leveller in capitalist structures.
 - *Note on the Workshop:* Flourishing Lives offered a limited number of **£50 bursaries** to participants who might find it hard to attend due to self-employment, part-time work, or being a sole worker/volunteer in a community organisation.
- **Reciprocity Beyond Money:** Value should extend beyond financial metrics (the colonialist model of extraction). Deep connection builds a sense of reciprocity where people gain other benefits (e.g., support, networking) alongside potential financial support.
- **Avoiding Extraction:** A common critique is the "extractional relationship" where lived experience is taken and then the individuals are ignored after the information is gathered. True reciprocity involves involving people in the resulting project development and ensuring they are paid when their ideas lead to funding.

Key Learning 5: Sustaining Transformation

The workshop suggested focusing on direction rather than rigid plans, and continuing the dialogue both externally and internally.

- **Embracing the Unexpected:** It is crucial to anticipate that conversations might lead to conflict or unexpected outcomes. The advice is to **plan for the unexpected** by having a *direction* instead of a rigid plan, which allows the process to incorporate unforeseen events.
 - **Internal Reflection:** Teams should create space for curiosity, joy, fun, and play *within their own structures* (e.g., team meetings) to foster the conversations and action points necessary for change.
 - **Acknowledging Time:** Transformation is a slow, embedded process, comparable to metamorphosis, where the final result may bear no structural resemblance to the starting point. It requires patience and investment.
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Contact details & shared links

Here are the contact details and links that were shared during the session:

- **Equal Voices webpage:** <https://www.dacorum.gov.uk/equal-voices> (this also has information about [an in-person Equal Voices event on 4th December](#) at the bottom with booking link – everyone is welcome so please do register if you would like to attend!).
- **Equal Voices email:** equalvoices@outlook.com

Other emails & links:

- **Monica Callan:** monica@communityactiondacorum.org.uk
- **Nadine Corbin:** hello@thecre8rs.com
- **Imrana Mahmood:** imrana.m.im@gmail.com
- **Diana Houghton:** Diana.Houghton@dacorum.gov.uk
- **Will Nicholson:** Hi I'm Will Nicholson, an independent arts health and wellbeing maverick 😊 and part of the Anti-racist Action in Arts and Wellbeing Steering Group and Equal Voices. Lovely to meet you all. Feel free to connect with me on LinkedIn [\(24\) William Nicholson | LinkedIn](#) or wanicholson@gmail.com
[The change we want to see — A Better Way](#) - here is a link to the Better Way Principles and Behaviours that were on the slide during the session :)
- **Charlotte Hailey-Watts:** Hi I'm Charlotte Hailey-Watts I'm a Freelance Theatre and Arts Facilitator and Access Support Worker in these areas. I am co-founder and Co-Director of Change, Act! a Theatre CIC that work with communities facing social and health inequalities to co-create Theatre towards social change with people's lived experiences. My email is charlotte@change-act.org and we're on Linked in and Instagram @change_act_theatre always looking to collaborate with new orgs
- **Hiten Mistry - Rasa Rising CIC:** Hi My name is Hiten Mistry, I am the founder director of Rasa Rising CIC, a community driven arts and heritage based in Leicester. Would love to connect with you all. Please do check out our website - www.rasarising.com and email me - hiten@rasarising.com
- **Leanne Levitt - Community Action Dacorum:** leanne@communityactiondacorum.org.uk
- **Kate Price (She/Her) - Arts Network:** Great to be part of this discussion and thanks to everyone involved. Keep in touch. Kate Price, CEO Arts Network (an arts and mental health charity) Email: kate@artsnetwork.org.uk. Social media: @artsnetworkldn. Website: www.artsnetwork.org.uk
- **Sophie Merriman – Meet Me at The Albany:** I'm Sophie, I work on Meet Me..., an Over 65s arts and social project based in Deptford South East London, collaborating with members and artists. <https://www.thealbany.org.uk/take-part/meet-me> I am on sophie.merriman@thealbany.org.uk

- **Penny Fosten - Arts for Dementia:** Please do contact us if you'd like to connect - Arts for Dementia - www.artsfordementia.org and penny@artsfordementia.org
- **Clare Truscott - Brixton Umbrella Circle:** . I'm Clare Truscott - part of the Brixton Umbrella Circle for older lgbtq+ people and trustee of Lambeth Links, our local lgbtq+ forum. I work closely with Ted Brown on 'Not going in the care closet! campaign.
brixtonumbrellacircle@gmail.com