The Event

Thirty members of the Dialogue Community of Practice met on 25th June, to review the progress and learning from the Community of Practice events during the last 12 months and to talk and think together about the future focus and form of our Community.

Sharon Millar set the scene for the day, describing our intention to draw upon the inspiration of our Scottish Waterways for our review, comparing the new lease of life our Waterways are getting and the way they attract people to them, with the ‘complex thinking’ abilities we need to develop if we are to grow bigger minds and transform public services.

The design for the day was in three parts:

- **Taking stock** - Reviewing and sharing our individual and collective experience and learning over the year;
- **What matters most** - Identifying the exciting and challenging issues we are facing over the next 12-18 months and considering how dialogue might be of benefit; and
- **Continuing to shape the Community of Practice** - Specifying the training, networks and practical support wanted in relation to developing our individual and collective Dialogue Practice.

Following a ‘check in’ in trios, Sharon invited participants to consider throughout the day, how their dialogue practice was developing or rippling out and used the “Ripples” model to describe levels of practice from self realisation, through to ‘Affecting the Field’.
Part One: Taking Stock  
Reviewing and Sharing our Individual and Collective Experience and Learning

This first series of conversations took the key themes we had identified from Community of Practice members Learning Logs, positioning different themes as stations around the room and inviting participants to move around the room, joining conversations at various stations and adding their reflections and comments in relation to the theme. This was an opportunity to test out the themes we had identified and to further inquire with those present to help shape the Community of Practice model moving forward.

The room was set up in keeping with the Waterways theme, with each of the stations connected together by blue ribbon, representing the connecting up of different Waterways.

The themes explored at the ‘stations’ were:
- Using the Skills and Practices
- Depth and Width of focus in the Community of Practice
- Inclusivity and Exclusivity within the Community of Practice
- Theory and Practice
- Self and Others
- Personal and Organisational
- Getting and Giving Support
- Involving Others / Widening the Conversation

Following smaller group conversations at each of the stations, feedback relating to each theme was shared with the whole room, which encompassed a mix of ideas for shaping the form of the Community of Practice moving forward as well as key insights and learning from working with Dialogue. Below is a summary of the key points from the feedback discussion.
**Overall Summary from Taking Stock Exercise**

**Using the Skills and Practices / Theory and Practice**
- Safe Experimenting
  - Live Situations – support for this – working with fear “threats” – handling yourself and others. Building confidence from what already do, what’s your learning edge and crossing over the thresholds
  - Anonymity helpful
  - Reflective Practice Forum Theatre
- Dialogue as a ‘neutral’ approach
  - Could support NHS / Health and Social Care
  - Evidence of impact – personal and wider
  - How to affect the field

**Getting and Giving Support**
- In live situations
- Peer support
- practice groups
- Journal Clubs
- Identifying ‘First Followers’
- How to make it ‘cool’ to practice
- Support to step over the thresholds

**Involving Others – Widening the Conversation**
- The power of personal story – it’s naturally inclusive
- Providing different offerings in different ways
- Inclusivity: Both / and / and / and...

**Self and Others**
- Being aware of assumptions
- Seeking to understand own and others needs and values
- Investing time rather than complaining about time
- Remembering the value of inquiry

**Depth and Width**
- Depth to support others
- Width reflects the changing world we operate in...
- The nature of delving below the surface – values, beliefs and emotions

**Inclusivity and Exclusivity**
- Some processes allow support of both depth and inclusivity (e.g. fishbowl)
- Inclusivity allows newness and freshness
- Exploring why do people not come back to DCOP
- What engages / what not – how can we work with both
- How much boundary is appropriate / helpful

**Personal and Organisation**
- Balancing personal practice and organisational practice
- Balancing embodying the practice versus understanding the theory
- Identifying organisational benefits?
- Unproductive meetings – tackling this
- Highlighting gaps and making different choices
Taking Stock
Detailed input from Group Conversations by Theme

Getting and Giving Support
- Understanding and Recognising Practice
- Confidence to Bystand
- Building support in situ – how to do this? – ensuring flexibility, debriefing
- Practice groups – to challenge practice – internal and external
- Create other support options:
  - Forum theatre
  - Role modelling practice (externals, help from other organisations)
  - Mentoring
  - Public Service Collaborative
  - Building support networks – sharing locally who has been involved

Theory and Practice
- Offering a mix of virtual support e.g. reading list and actual support e.g. journal club sharing relevant articles / books and reflecting together
- Reinforce the theory as we ‘practice’ dialogue – making it visible
- Encouraging group members – more experienced and others to bystand as to what’s happening in the dialogue
- Whistle-stop tour of the language of dialogue
- Have speakers present to all on specialist areas – e.g. childhood stories, building a safe container
- Fishbowl to demonstrate dialogue with bystanders noticing the practices followed by ‘novice group’ learning
- Always include time for reflecting on how the process was
- Forum to discuss how to be aware of own practice and then use the process ‘out there’
- Offer one off sessions on specific topics (flash workshops)
- Workshop that is part teaching and part practice opportunities
- Idiot guide sessions outside the DCOP days which allow novices to participate in different groups

Self and Others
- Understand different frames of reference – how to hear each other
- Ensuring taking account of / hearing own and others needs and values
- Time required to build trust and relationship
- Identifying in the moment what matters most
- Fields of Conversation – recognising when we are being polite and go beyond it
- Enquiry is key – deeper enquiry, challenging your own and others assumptions

Depth and Width
- It’s a false split – conclusion was the DCOP needs both
- Depth is important for Practitioners to continue to develop their practice and support less experienced members
Depth gives capacity to explore own and others practice in the moment
Width and keeping it open, reflects the word we operate in, constantly changing
Width ensures people can come in and out and not feel excluded
Dialogue provides a way of going deeper – delving into beliefs, values and emotions re issues

**Personal and Organisational**
- Being aware of what I am doing, what we are doing
- Embodying the theory / employing it – being authentic and honest
- Getting the tools out there – what are the organisational benefits
- Benefits – why do I feel so much better after that conversation?
- Need to make time to practice – “On Wednesday at 12 we will do dialogue!”
- Need a rolling programme of introduction to dialogue
- Work with drama – try out scenarios
- Dialogue provides another way to have conversation
- Do people need permission – can they take authority and power to have a different type of conversation

**Inclusivity and Exclusivity**
- Like the fishbowl process – means people with deeper knowledge can have conversations that others can hear and learn from – depth and inclusivity
- Keep an introductory way in – people can feel intimidated if they don’t have the language
- How to be included – is it word of mouth
- It’s refreshing to be with different people, but who do we want to be here?
- Group size – less rich dialogue when 20-30 people
- Bring a friend – good way to expand – but need to find out what people don’t come back. Has the knowledge people leave with been enough?
- Core group and spin off groups
- Reflective element on the dialogue important for inclusivity – e.g. for joining in conversation topics no knowledge of
- Exclusivity – requires more knowledge of a theme
- Natural inclusivity at the level of story
- Explore possible structure and boundaries on conversations for introductory groups

**Using the Skills and Practices**
- Community good and safe place to practice
- Consider what would enable me to use it more, transfer from using in DCOP to other settings?
- Recognising the potential for its use in H&SCI – it would help both, but neither have owned this
- As an ‘isolated’ individual – how do I encourage other people to support / understand?
- Funding training for the 3rd sector
- Having the confidence to train others myself
- Practice is what it is all about – tell folk, ask for others to join you
• How to cope with the violent backwash when hierarchy wants to dominate?
• Wriggle room / closed doors
• Gaining entry

Involving Others – Widen the Conversation
• Personal invitation to share / show up
• Evidence of impact important – personal and wider
• Why people on mailing are list and yet not engaged?
  o How do we know they are not engaged?!
• Strength in anonymity here
• Need to connect the concepts / practice to real work
• Sense of isolation – threshold First Followers, bringing it in, connecting it up – who is there? What might we do?
• Help people with verbal 360, honest conversations - need facilitated
• Personal stories – uninterrupted monologue, sense make and engage
• Sponsorship helps
• Make dialogue legitimate – cool to practice! Bridge the misunderstanding of ‘softness’ and ‘hardness’
**Part Two: What Matters Most**

*Identifying the exciting and challenging issues we are now facing and considering how dialogue might be of benefit*

In this second series of conversations, in order to enable the Community of Practice to continue to focus on topics that ‘matter most’, participants were asked individually to write on post it’s the top issues / challenges they were now facing.

Topics identified were as follows:
- Leadership
- Culture Change
- Developing Self for Dialogue
- Teams in Difficulty
- Big Issues for Scotland, including Collaborative Working
- Personal Outcomes

Participants chose a topic group to join and had conversations exploring their challenge and how dialogue might be of help. To feed back, one representative of each group was invited to join a fishbowl conversation in the middle of the room in order to share the essence of their group conversations, whilst other participants listened. Below is a summary of the key points shared.

**Leadership**
- To what end? Delivering services
- Themes
- Designated leaders & how to develop
- Models around leadership
- Supporting vulnerability
- Deal with unexpected outcomes
- Collaboration
- Conflicted
- Self - and foibles

**Developing Self for Dialogue**
- Ego can get in the way, let it go? Listen
- Trust grows when you have been heard
- Value yourself and speak
- Defensiveness and how to overcome our internal dialogue
- Interplay - internal dialogue / external dialogue

**Teams in Difficulty**
- Power issues /request to sort folk?
- How to enter if bringing in dialogue?
- What are the tools and how to work with teams?
- How to sort self?

**Culture Change**
- On programmes - well / less well
- Dialogue with intent - what matters to you
- Dialogue as a neutral tool
- Dialogue and uncertain outcomes
  - If key person says no, what to do?!
  - Dialogue is a challenge to the system
- Can we have faith in ourselves? Our altruism?
- Say yes to ‘how’ questions
- Demonstrate before ...
- Embarrassing folk into Culture Change
- Big challenge
- Command and control
- Leadership in this model
- Democratic system
  - Winners and Losers
  - Wants certainty
  - No risk

**Big Issues for Scotland**
- Then me and what I can do?

**Personal Outcomes**
- We stand in our own way
As groups only had a relatively short time to explore their topic, many of the groups had only begun to explore how dialogue might support them in addressing their challenge. The conversation very much focused on where to focus attention initially in addressing challenges:

**Them**
- Up there
- Get people into the room
- Locality structures and evidence base from around the world (PhD report)
- How do we link up with other puddles and make a bigger pond?
- Bring in ‘entertainment’ factor
- Bring in our failures
- Use Forum Theatre to explore
- Bus - take dialogue to them

**Us**
- Can we be demonstrators?
- Can we share worst practice and be honest?

**We**
- Getting there

**In addressing Challenges - Where should we put our energy?**

Following the fishbowl feedback conversation, participants who were listening were asked to ‘bystand’ on the conversation, sharing what they had noticed:

**Whole Group Observations on Fishbowl Conversations:**
- Include ego
- Include fear
- Receive
- Focus on those in charge
- Need focus on those in group - all folk
- Can we use dialogue to help across the divide – those in charge and all others?
Our afternoon session focused on asking participants to define the support they wanted from the Community of Practice moving forward and what was needed to make this a reality - what were the practicalities?

Based on the output from our mornings work and our experience of the Community of Practice over the last year, we asked the group to self select into two groups: new to dialogue and more experienced in dialogue and then had smaller group conversations to capture their requests and ideas around practicalities.

Here’s what they said:

**Novice Group Summary Requests**

| Local Venues                        | • Perth  
|                                   | • Glasgow  
|                                   | • Edinburgh  
|                                   | • Fife  
|                                   | • North Scotland  
| Frequency                          | • Once per month  
|                                   | • 6weekly  
|                                   | • Every 6 months  
| Resources including Virtual       | • Links  
|                                   | • Reading List  
|                                   | • DVD’s  
|                                   | • SKYPE / JABBER  
|                                   | • Translating theory into Webinar / DVD  
|                                   | • Drama and Role Play  
|                                   | • Intensive input on underpinning models  
|                                   | • Actors to help demonstrate skills  
| Mixed group people                | • Around 6 people  
| Flash bomb - theory to start      | • Suggestions ranged from 2 hours to 2 days – theory  
|                                   | • Practice and reflection  
|                                   | • Follow up with Practice Groups  

### Experienced Group Summary Requests

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Colleageal dialogue supervision</th>
<th>Opportunity to Play</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Over a longer period (supporting in moving past politeness)</td>
<td>• Self</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Share - successes, failures, awareness</td>
<td>• Practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Safety</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Bring all of myself</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Again, in analysing the attendance and learning logs from participants over the year, two main groups of attendees were identified, those where working with processes like dialogue in supporting their work with individuals, teams and systems are a fundamental element of the ‘day job’ for example, for OD Professionals, HR Professionals etc and those where it is not.

On the day, we asked the group to self select again into these sub groups and then explored in conversation their requests for the Community of Practice going forward. Their requests are summarised below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Summary Requests - Day Job</th>
<th>Summary Requests - Not Day Job</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Watch out for / bystand on the jargon</td>
<td>• Help</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Use time here re-naming the practices as we go.</td>
<td>o Themselves</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Having others to reflect with - what worked, what didn’t work. Options for reflection include:</td>
<td>▪ To bring more into their day job and current Government Strategies e.g. Personal Outcomes, Person Centred, across Public Sector Collaborations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Via web</td>
<td>▪ To teams I manage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Face to face – groups or paired</td>
<td>▪ To my peer groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Reading groups</td>
<td>▪ To others I meet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Reflecting on / exploring key topics / subjects</td>
<td>o Buddy (offers placed on the knowledge hub)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o How do you ‘get in’</td>
<td>▪ Phone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o How you model</td>
<td>▪ With you</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o How you badge</td>
<td>▪ Supervision</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o How you contract for the work</td>
<td>▪ Coaching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Gather evidence of what works / impact</td>
<td>▪ Observations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• How to take dialogue to others?</td>
<td>• Bring in others to support – skilled practitioners, pay people to do it?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Essence of dialogue</td>
<td>o Introduction to dialogue for themselves</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Menu</td>
<td>o Bigger pieces / linked pieces of work e.g. person centred, personal outcomes, collaborative group public sector,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Container building</td>
<td>• Connected Folk Interested</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Processes</td>
<td>• Materials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Models</td>
<td>o Flash Cards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Balancing being prescriptive versus explaining in own way</td>
<td>o Tools for Self Reflection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Caring Conversation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Emotional Touchpoints</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Demonstrating Outcomes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o Case Study review</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o Pod Casts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o Relationships – quality and development of these</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Use outcomes to develop case to get more Training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Bring in others to support – skilled practitioners, pay people to do it?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o Introduction to dialogue for themselves</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o Bigger pieces / linked pieces of work e.g. person centred, personal outcomes, collaborative group public sector,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Connected Folk Interested</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Materials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o Flash Cards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o Tools for Self Reflection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Caring Conversation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Emotional Touchpoints</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Demonstrating Outcomes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o Case Study review</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o Pod Casts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o Relationships – quality and development of these</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Use outcomes to develop case to get more Training</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Way Forward – Plan for the Dialogue Community of Practice

We came away from the Review of the Dialogue Community of Practice with a clear map of the support individuals are looking for to help their work with dialogue.

It is our intention to work up the different types of support outlined here over the Summer and prepare the final ‘prospectus’ in time for individuals to sign up and start the activity in the Autumn.

Education options:
- 2hr Introduction to Dialogue (continue hosting an open, mixed group at Community of Practice events)
- 4hr Introduction to the theory underpinning dialogue (open to individuals or team based provision)
- Create web based learning resources (e.g. videos, tutorials, DVDs, Webinar) to aid understanding of theories and observe good practice.

Practice Group options:
- Introduction to theory and practice of dialogue: Learn theory and practice over 6 to 9 months. (Closed group, mix of practitioners and leaders)
  1 day followed by up to 6 half days held 4 and 6 weeks apart. Can be formed by drawing together individuals seeking to learn and practice or formed around an existing team or group if numbers allow.
- Themed dialogue groups (Closed group once formed, mix of practitioners and leaders).
  Groups can be formed by drawing together individuals keen to explore a theme in depth and who agree to work together following an initial ‘chemistry and contracting’ discussion. Participants would need to commit to meet together over 6 – 9 months at a time and frequency agreed by the group.

Possible themes already identified include:
- Health and Social Care Integration
- Leadership
- Culture Change
- Developing Self
- Teams in Difficulty
- Big Issues for Scotland
- Personal Outcomes

Supervision for Dialogue Practice:
- Create a space on the Knowledge Hub to enable experienced dialogue practitioners to upload their profiles and ‘offers’ of support. The intention is to make it easier for helping people seeking to work with dialogue to make contact with experienced practitioners independently to:
  - gain supervision for their work or
- seek a ‘buddy’ to work with within their organisation or with a particular team.
- commission someone to work with teams and systems

- Collegial dialogue supervision – Closed supervision group which would commit to meet over a long period of time to support individuals move past politeness and share successes, failures and awareness.

**Dialogue Community of Practice events**: (open and mixed national events)
Continue to host national Dialogue Community of Practice. Commit to hosting two before 31st March 2015, and support local/regional dialogue based gatherings. In particular, seek to shape communications that shape and spread dialogue messaging and connect the Dialogue Community of Practice with other national and local areas of work which facilitate involvement and broad base participation with staff and communities. (E.g. Skilled Workers, Skilled Citizens, Climate change).

**Leadership Development – ‘Test of change’**: A leadership development for a cohort of seasoned, experienced senior leaders who are committed to develop their complexity thinking abilities and to changing leadership presence in conversations. Taster workshop from which a closed practice group will be established and supported to meet 1 day every two months over a 12 month period. This would require a significant investment of time.