

Recruiting for diversity – Q&A session

My name is Viv Evans from Adfam, the national charity for families affected by substance misuse.

Q: What I wanted to ask Diverse City is, if I've understood you correctly, you don't go out to open recruitment for your trustees?

Am I right? We do go out to open recruitment and it's something that quite a lot of our funders insist on. **So I wondered how you squared that with equality of opportunity?**

Claire: Yes it's a very interesting one. I'm going to be absolutely truthful - we haven't gone out to open recruitment to recruit our board because the thing about open recruitment is, and I would say this is exactly the same for jobs, is that open recruitment and jobs that are advertised have brought us the same results time and time again. It's because we assume that everyone starts in the same place on the starting line. The thing is when you put out opportunities of any sort, the most privileged and confident people will apply and that hasn't worked for us up until now. I think we really need to do some new thinking about it.

There's lots of the world that works by tapping people on the shoulder and we thought that it's the wrong thing as it has associations of old boys' networks but we've never played that game ourselves and so we've never really been able to measure the results. But advertising jobs in the Guardian, I am a Guardian reader by the way and this isn't about the Guardian, isn't equality.

I'm just saying that up until now we thought that advertising things would bring us a wide range of candidates and the truth is it doesn't. So we've tried something else and I'm not saying we've done the right thing, we've just done one thing.

Chair: I'm going to just read a couple of questions from the Glisser.

Q: How did sharing and distributing leadership support increase diversity? Has it attracted diverse talent in recent recruitment?

Sophie: Ok, I think I'll talk a bit about our board as well. Something that we've done at Bootcamp recently is recruit two new board members specifically from our pool of alumni which is quite diverse. The two people we've got are both BME, they're both quite young, they've both never been on a board before. So like I kind of relate to what you were saying [Claire] about doing that recruitment and knowing who you want.

It's been really good. It's quite early days actually – there's only been one board that they've been on so far but they've really brought a completely new perspective both in terms of organisational strategy but we're also doing some recruitment for our paid

work as well. Their ideas around where we can go out to find people to apply to those jobs that are not just going to be Guardian readers have been really interesting. Just as an example, they had ideas about how we could word job adverts in a way that they were thinking would speak to their mum or aunt who are all people that are perfectly good candidates. So that's something we've been doing recently.

Chair: [Reading a question from Glisser]

Q: Once we have recruited a diverse board, how do we ensure that it is accessible to them?

I'm assuming the 'it' is accessibility to be an active and engaged trustee. Simply putting people on the board isn't enough, it's how you make that experience available for them.

Claire: In terms of what we've done in our boards to make it accessible... everyone has the material well in advance so that they can prepare and read it. We take enough time... I would say our meetings are well chaired and we have... I'm trying to think... I think people more comfortable about contributing perhaps in previous boards I've been part of. I'm trying to think the ways that it's different. It might appear slightly more relaxed? But the same things are happening. I think accessibility... it's not so different. It's wondering about whether governance is really really difficult or not. I'm not sure it's difficult.

At our last board meeting, I was thinking today, Dave who's the youngest board member at twenty-four said to me "I think that you've got a problem because you're trying to balance too many shows at the same time but I'm only twenty-four so what do I know" as a sort of joke. Then two weeks after the board meeting, I was thinking yeah, that's exactly the problem that I have - I'm trying to do three shows at the same time and it feels really stressful and I can't quite work it out.

I think that accessibility is that you want clear sightedness and clear headedness from people and I think the majority of people can absolutely provide that. I think boards as they exist are accessible if they're comfortable and that people feel they can speak and that people feel that what they say will be valued. It's only when people pretend that there's some mystery going on which there really isn't. Boards are just there to make sure that the right thing is being done and that the most good can be done with what resources exist. I think that a lot of people can make sure that happens. I would be in favour of really demystifying things. In a similar way, every other aspect of society life in order to make more people feel that they can participate. A lot of other people feel they can't be councillors or governors either and it's not for them and we really have to change that if we want different people in charge. Because I really really want that at the moment.

Comment from the audience: But a page of budget figures, and we all have a lot of funders who demand a certain standard of financial reporting, and a page of budget figures are a page of budget figures. It's not demystifying it. With our board - I am

Co-Director of Streetwise Opera - we make sure we have a really good representation of people who are or have been homeless, which are the people who come to Streetwise Opera, we always make sure that there are people on the board. What we do is we have a buddy for them, we have a board buddy and they'll meet up before the board and they'll go through the papers with them an hour before each board meeting, or even over the telephone and make sure that they get that support because sometimes there are things you just can't present in a way that's different. So I think it's about giving people the support they need in order to understand things.

Claire: Absolutely, I agree. We do also do some of those things but I think it's working out different people will need different support.

Dan Crossley from the Food Ethics Council: We're very much early in this journey that was talked about, but I do think this agenda is hugely important. Just picking up on one of the things that I think Claire talked about, about needing to move into new networks which is really important. Certainly many organisations and charities in the food sector are very guilty, us included, often of talking to and recruiting people we know, that sort of sentiment.

Q: Are there any practical tips on how or where to go to reach out to new networks?

Kate: We're using our service users, the women that are working with us. I do think that starting there. For us it's prisons or people recently left prison, but obviously there are restrictions especially for the group that we work on in terms of certain roles and memberships of boards. We have dealt with the nightmare scenario of having to negotiate with the Charity Commission around people who have an offending background. That really is an issue which needs to be dealt with because aside from anything else, it just doesn't need to be that bureaucratic but I know that's true of everything with the Charity Commission but there we go.

Sophie: I don't know if this applies to the kind of work that you do, but I can talk a bit about something that we've done at Bootcamp recently which is really go out to communities physically, not just reaching out by email. We've recently hired a Community Coordinator who goes out to visit various activist groups, including people who have come on the programme to keep that sense of community and the relationship which grows and they can recommend Bootcamp to people who they work with, who live in their communities but also new communities. We look for groups of people - refugees fighting for their asylum claims, a group of women who were campaigning to get a female lifeguard when it was the female swimming hour for example. Just really niche groups. Spending time trying to find those people and speaking to them about what you can offer them I think is really important as well. We offer really good training courses. If people come on them and then benefit from them, they become advocates themselves and talk about what you are offering to people from their communities.

Comment from audience: My name is Jenn Lewis. I am CEO of Communities Empowerment Network. For the first time while you were all speaking, I started just to tally up our own workforce and it's 80% BAME, 70% women and our board is also 40% female and 60% BAME. I've never thought about it. I know I've got a very London-centric perspective I'm sure, because I know diversity and London seem to go together. The rest of the country perhaps it isn't as diverse, and I am aware of that.

I was thinking in terms of representation diversity attracts diversity in that respect. I don't want to use that term colour blind because it's annoying, but you almost become that way because you're not looking for, "I need to place x number of people who look like, sound like...". Also, again, I added in here 10% LGBTQ because it's just that person just so happens to be... I think that's actually quite important that we are, again not wanting to use the word colour blind, but colour blind, or accessibility blind if you like, in terms of who we recruit. I've benefitted from that I think. For the first time I'm thinking "actually, was I recruited because I was female? A black woman?". I don't think so but perhaps that has had an impact in terms of who I've then gone on to recruit. I'm not sure. So less of a question, more you've just made me really think so thank you. You've given me food for thought in something I hadn't actually thought about before.

Chair: Thank you. We said we would discuss the tough stuff so a couple of questions here [from Glisser].

Q: Kate spoke about stepping aside in giving up power. What does that mean in practice?

Kate: Resigning sometimes looks like a very good option, especially doing jobs like this! I do think it's knowing when it is time that your leadership has run its course and you've been in the right place at the right time and you've done the best you can. It's good to be able to plan successions. At the moment we're about to new trustees and looking at succession planning for the leadership of our board so I do think stepping aside is about planning for that. Not to hark about Sophie Harker from the Women's Equality Party but she said something on Woman's Hour about a week ago. She said she hoped the leader that followed her wasn't one person. That it was possibly a group of leaders. In the women's sector, a lot of CEOs, myself included, are saying these aren't jobs for one person. So I think stepping aside is about saying leadership isn't the model that we think it is. It isn't one person and I would love Women in Prison to be led by more than one person right at the top, properly, not pretend job shares or something like that. I don't think it's a very good answer to the question. Does anyone want to say it isn't?!

Sophie: I just think that the point about being able to job share is a really good one and makes it more accessible as well. Just before we came here I was asking my boss - our Chief Exec has been on parental leave so my current boss has been the acting Chief Exec whilst he's been away – and I said "would you step into that role if he decided to leave?". She has two young kids, she has a very busy life. One of her

kids has got access needs at school. She just said “I don’t have the time but I would do it as a job share but I don’t think that is an option”. So I think that’s a really valid point.

Chair: [Reading a question from Glisser]

Q: If we don’t value experience, aren’t we at risk of undervaluing the contribution of older people? Don’t we need age diversity and to tackle age discrimination to?

Kate: We were talking about this actually because time is a real issue on boards and I think you mentioned about the lifecycle and time. There is something about younger people and there is something about older people and time. Certainly on our board we definitely value experience and we’ve got a real spread in terms of age but I feel that we need to be doing more to promote the time that people have in older age and that’s something that on boards it’s almost like the different ends of the spectrum and letting off the people in the middle.

I would just like to say as well that I am a part-time CEO that does four days a week but often doesn’t. I applied for my role as a full-time role but said that I would only accept it if it was a part-time position. I think that we should much more advertise for board roles as well around flexibility. Coming to meetings for example is a real issue because obviously if you miss a certain number of meetings... but being able to negotiate that with people is important.

Claire: I’m glad I was provocative about the experience thing. No I don’t want to undervalue experience, I just want to make sure that there’s a full age range of people because I think that when there is a full age range there can be really dynamic discussions. I mean I think our own board ranges from twenty four to seventy and I think people have got a lot to say to each other of different ages. But often I’ve found my own experience is that there is sometimes a moving towards the middle of ages that doesn’t have the whole range. So no, obviously I don’t want my own experience to be undervalued, otherwise I’ll be stepping aside. Sharing power, to go back to what we were talking about before, not only enables more people to participate in leadership if we share power rather than invest in one individual, but sharing power is crucial for different perspectives to be able to work together.

My name is Jamila. I’m Operations Manager at a charity called Futureversity. We work with young people.

Q: I wanted to go back to the question of ‘the queen is dead, long live the new queen’! As in you’ve stepped aside but what’s the step before? Is there some sort of mentorship programme going on where you’ve got a group of people that are within your organisation you’re upskilling? I’m not going to give up the power but at the same time if I have knowledge, I will share that with you. I will show you how to do things in the way I do it that makes me successful. I’m not necessarily training you to take my job because I really like my job! At the same time I’ve worked

with some young people that I've shown them the best of what I can do, I've tried to help them grow and then watched them go off and do other things and be successful. How is that tying into your plans for diversity and diversifying at the top?

Kate: For me it's the whole demystifying thing. At the end of the day these jobs are just gruelling, there's no special secret to them. I know it's pretty straightforward but shadowing? When I came to Women in Prison I sent several emails saying if anyone wants to shadow me just let me know and no one ever did. I thought it's probably annoying getting those emails and then recently a couple of people talked about shadowing me and I realised that I probably need to try that a lot more. Even tonight, usually I just would think "no one's going to want to come to an event in the evening, I'm going for Women in Prison" but I'm going to try and be a bit more open about that. Also mentoring is massively important. I said at the last staff away day in Women in Prison that I hope that the next CEO of Women in Prison is in that room and I think we need to start from that assumption, and it doesn't happen and it often isn't explicit.

Claire: I don't think you should give up your power at all. I think when we're talking about sharing power, it's talking about privilege. [...] People sharing power who've got privilege. What we're all trying to do is keep passing the ladder down all the time isn't it? Trying to share with people. Lots of people share with us to help us on our journey and then we keep doing the same for the people and it all works together. I think when we talk about sharing power it's people understanding when they've got privilege and when they need to step aside, and when other people will know what to do better.

Q: Just a tiny bit of preamble so I can get down to the nitty gritty. **I'm Sam O'Sullivan, I'm the Head of Finance and HR at the Prison Reform Trust** and as the name might suggest, we look at prison conditions. The observation I've got to make is that the lady in front of me (Jenn Lewis) pointed out that she didn't really have to think about the makeup of her organisation and that's an ideal as I see it – if you don't really have to think about it. My question is, how about if you do and you have thought about it, have looked at it from all different kinds of angles - we've considered things like accessibility, we've sought advice and to some degree and in some areas, it still doesn't seem to be working. I'm not suggesting that we throw in the towel and give it all up but **where do we go when we've done all that we think we can do and that we've asked other people about and it still doesn't have the results that we'd hoped for?**

Sophie: I can start. I'm not sure I'll have the answer. Firstly I would say that I do think that it's always going to be a bit of a journey like we said at the beginning and that there is no end point. Maybe this isn't an answer because I think you did mention it briefly, but I would definitely recommend seeking outside consultation. I realise I always make the point that you should be putting the budget behind this and paying external facilitators, diversity consultants, that kind of thing. I realise when I say that, that a lot of the organisations I've worked at wouldn't really have that budget, or it would be near impossible to convince the person who holds the budget

to free it up for that. I think a lot of organisations when they do invest in that kind of thing will get someone in for a day or something and that really isn't enough. Really you need someone who can work with you long term to really delve into your various strategies and also come up with a plan about how to change that and then check in and work with you going forward to make sure those things actually happen. I don't know if that really answers [your question] because I think you've done it a little bit but I would try and think about putting more time and more money into it because it does take time. A lot of organisations I've seen have just slapped a one time thing on it and then not seen results and I think it's a bit more than that.

Kate: I think the key thing is that we need to get together with other people that are a bit stuck so, obviously Prison Reform Trust is a really close partner of us. I think one of the things is that no one sort of owns up to it. We get stuck on our own and we kind of hope no one else is going to notice that we're stuck because it is such a difficult area and because it's not great to say you're stuck to funders and so on. That's why I think having the open conversations...When I was asked to speak on this panel I actually felt anxious even being asked, and I'm not usually anxious when I'm asked to speak. It was just putting us up there and I think that the more we can do that, that's when change will happen.

Chair: Can I just make an observation from my perspective which is that if you were offered a million pounds to get it unstuck, what do you think might change in your organisation if there were an incentive big enough then people would start having maybe some difficult conversation that they don't have yet. So that's just some thoughts on what keeps a conversation stuck.

Comment from audience: I was actually just going to respond to that point - Rebecca from Battersea Arts Centre.

Just a couple of companies that we have worked with over the last few years that we have found helpful. So one thing is that about every six months we do an unconscious bias workshop with our team. I'm sure lots of people are doing those things but it has really helped in terms of opening up those difficult conversations and helping people to see where they do and don't have privilege and how that might be feeding into some of the decisions they're making around recruitment, artists that we programme and that kind of thing. We also worked with a company called Rare Recruitment who worked a lot in the City to bring in different people into organisations. They just gave us some really simple things like having different people shortlist to then the people who do the interviews. It just means that when people are doing the interviews, they haven't already decided who looks good on paper. There were just a few little tactics like that actually have genuinely made a difference for us.

Comment from audience: We just remove the names and give them numbers. A lot of people they see a particular name or a surname, there's an immediate assumption that "they're this kind of person". We also remove address details because again, people make an assumption "if you come from here, you must know about this".

Also, university, because there's an assumption about that too. Literally it's just about how they answer the questions. That's all they get at interview.

Comment from audience: There is an argument to say that redacting certain information from the application, just brings forward the bias to the interview stage. It's just an observation.

Chair: There's a burning question on Glisser.

Q: So how do you ensure it's safe for staff to raise concerns or ideas about diversity and inclusion? So how do we make it safe?

Sophie: Something that we've done at Bootcamp recently is form a sort of junior staff board. We have things like away days, we have forums, we have team meetings in which people could raise things but I can totally see why that would be intimidating. Actually I find it intimidating to raise things in those spaces. So we've recently set up a junior staff board which has representatives on it. They can either submit things anonymously or talk about it with their name against it. And we're recommending that they have meetings without any of the leadership team. If someone from the leadership team feels very strongly about something, so for example if someone on the leadership team wanted to talk about an incidence of racism or something, then they can ask the group if they can join it. Otherwise it's mostly for the junior staff because usually they're the ones who would feel a bit intimidated to raise these kinds of things. What they do is that they have a representative who then feeds back to the leadership team so we know that it's not necessarily coming from that staff member but they've just been chosen as the person. That's the kind of investment....we've said that you can take this time...it's quite a lot of time per month to discuss these kind of things. Made it clear that there's no repercussions, we're not spying on them or anything. That staff forum has been really effective in bringing about some real change. I mean we've changed our pay scales since that was set up, we've recruited the new board members and it's only been going since just before Christmas, so it's had some real impact already.

Kate: I mean we've experimented more with anonymous surveys which I think is important, but I do worry about that concept being a bit adversarial, and sometimes the potential for it to be used wrongly, in terms of using it a chance to raise issues that should be raised through other forums. But that's probably to do with my anxiety because this is quite new to us, but obviously the ideal is that we don't have to have anonymous surveys. So, I think the thing for me is the learning culture, and it being an exchange and not seen as an adversarial "I'm going to teach you how to do things". And I think we're sort of in the middle of that process, and it comes back to having those difficult conversations routinely, and finding spaces to have them.

Chair: I think this is the last question I'll take from Glisser.

Q: Are there risks or downsides with positive action that we should be aware of?

Kate: I've worked in male dominated environments for quite a few years before coming to Women in Prison, ironically. I worked with the police and in the civil service in national police training and it always fascinated me that whenever a woman rolled up, especially if she was a black woman, there was at some point some indication that she'd only got there because of one of those reasons. And yet for all the rubbish men that should never even have entered that building, no one ever said that was the reason. And I do think that's the classic excuse against positive action. That it will make everyone feel that that's why they got to their position. But I just don't hold with that, and I do think that is a potential downside to positive action but we need to kind of handle that and get to grips with it rather than saying "we can't do that because then people will say that".

Claire: It's just making it equal isn't it? It's making it a level playing field and undoing centuries and centuries of inequality. I mean, diversity wouldn't have to exist if there wasn't systematic inequality of race, class and gender and sexuality. That's why we have to have a conversation because people's lives are different and unequal and that's what we're trying to do something about. But diversity's deeply uncomfortable... to be clear, you have a diverse board and then you will be challenged all the time because many, many of the things that you're doing are not working and it's really great. But, as Amna said to me yesterday about our performers are pretty diverse so is our board, our core staff team isn't entirely yet. She just said "do you have all white recruitment panels" and I was like "yes we do, sometimes" and she was like "there's your problem". So, it's a great and interesting journey.

Sophie: I'm just going to say sort of the same thing. I don't agree with that [not taking positive action] and if you think about the opposite of that, which is not doing it, the risk is that you carry on this systemic oppression which is also bad. I think that people have been denied opportunities for a long time and they deserve to be given those opportunities. I think it's a good thing.

Chair: Thank you. Are there any other last burning questions? Something someone feels they really want to ask and hasn't had an opportunity to do so? If not I'll bring the Q&A session to an end. We're here for another half hour so please feel free to mix and mingle and ask each other what you do. Before I do close I'd like to say thank you to Sophie, Claire and Kate for a fantastic and fascinating discussion, and for your candidness in sharing your experience. Thank you.