

*To inspire
To challenge
To inform*

review
2003/06

regenerationsouthwest
network

Regeneration South West Network (RSWN) was established in 2003 with funding from Government Office for the South West (GOSW). The aim was to provide a learning network to bring together individuals and organisations with a common interest in the challenges and opportunities around regeneration, social inclusion issues and creating sustainable communities.

The purpose of this review is not only to look back at some of the activities and achievements which have taken place, it is also an acknowledgement of the Government's firm commitment towards achieving sustainable communities and sets out 'what next for the network'?

The project was managed by South West Forum and the Network has grown in line with creating:excellence, the regional centre for sustainable communities. RSWN is essentially a 'hub', connecting regeneration practitioners on the ground.

The Network is made up of over 2,300 individuals, organisations and networks, comprised of a diverse range of regeneration practitioners, professionals, residents, community and voluntary sector partners, and mainstream agencies including local and regional government bodies.

During the first three years the Network has:

- Served its members by sharing information, networking and developing skills and knowledge.
- Drawn on experience and insights of members to help inform the development of regional and national policy.

Sharing information and networking

RSWN has shared and disseminated relevant news and information effectively around the region, highlighting examples of successful practice and practitioners. This has enabled network members to improve knowledge in their own areas of work as well as increasing cross-sectoral understanding.

Key achievements have included:

Quarterly network newsletters (now creating:excellence enews), and Insight briefings published on themes following thematic learning events in 2004:

- Learning networks and regeneration
- Health and regeneration
- Community finance and regeneration
- Creativity: catalyst for renewal

(all available on the web site - see below)



Network Development

The benefits of networking are wide ranging and long lasting. The exchange of information and ideas

between both similar and diverse individuals and groups stimulates and encourages innovation, development and growth, and is essential to achieving sustainable communities.

As part of an overall 'Network Development Programme' the Network Development Fund was set up. Since July 2005, there have been 29 successful bids receiving funds totalling £30,831. This fund has been re-launched and 'topped-up' with additional funding from both creating:excellence and South West Foundation along with support through events such as 'Networking or Not-working' as well as resources, information and links on the creating:excellence and South West Foundation web sites. Grants have ranged from £200 to £2,500 (the limit is now £1,000).

For more information about the fund contact South West Foundation on 0117 968 0111 or email info@southwestfoundation.org.uk



The website

www.creatingexcellence.org.uk

The website receives an average of over 2000 sessions per month (over 8,500 page views) and also encourages interaction between members.

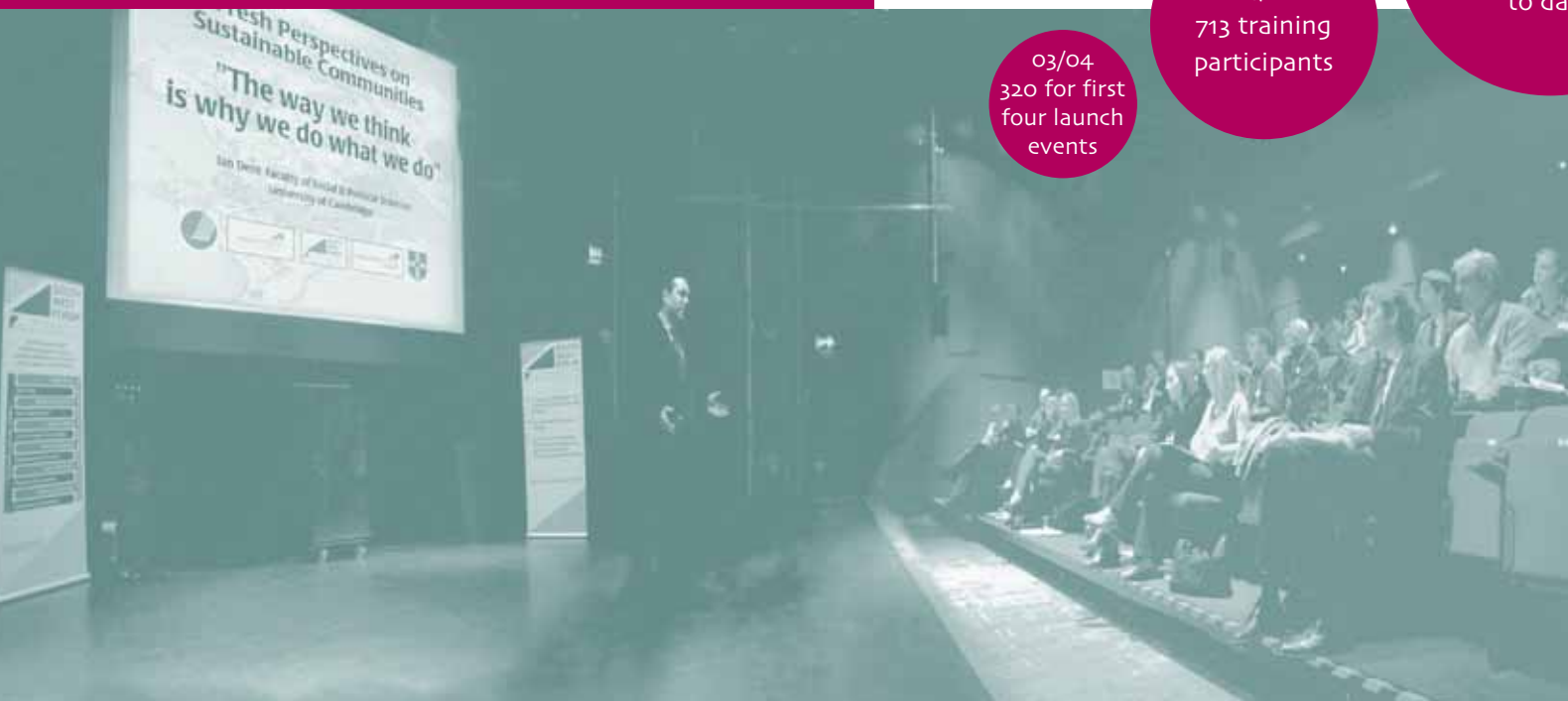
'Regenerators United' is a powerful online contacts database for practitioners who have formed not only 'interest groups' online, but also have the opportunity to post information about themselves and register as potential speakers for events.

We have also offered a 'help desk' style approach towards members for bespoke 'sign-posting' and enquiries over the last two years. Staff have dealt with an average of 1,100 such enquiries a year. Enquiries ranged from finding a useful contact or project to requests for advice about how a specific programme/project could link up with other organisations, locally, regionally and nationally.

2005/2006
835 training participants to date

2004/2005
713 training participants

03/04
320 for first four launch events



Learning by seeing, improving by doing . . .

The learning experience during an exchange visit or shadowing opportunity can be highly valuable. The 'Swap Shop Fund' was set up to fund such activities and help people gather and share information and examples of what has worked and what hasn't, in order to inform the development of their own practice or service. 'Spending a day in someone else's shoes' seems to have offered something useful for every participant.

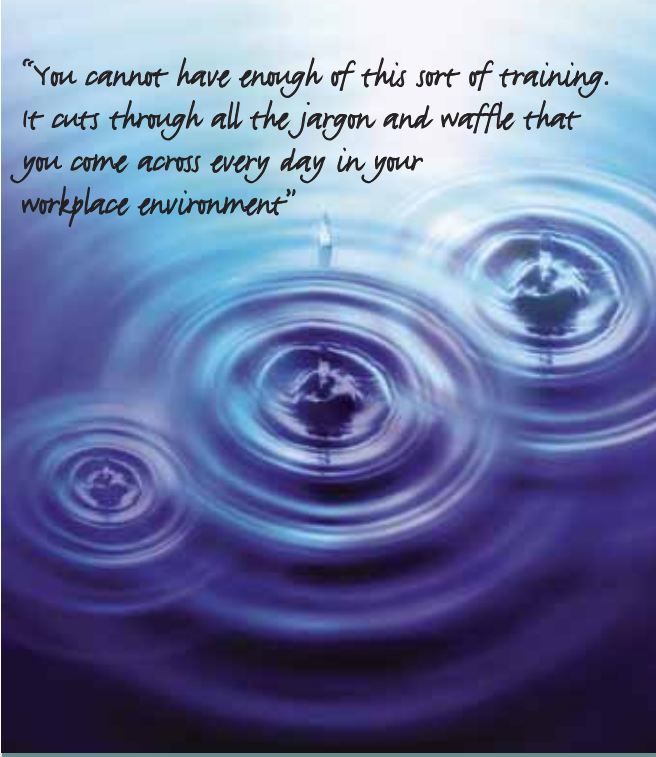
Applications ranged from woodland and coppicing projects; community shops; building sustainable transport routes; developing environmental education centres and learning more about eco-buildings, through to a youth project challenging homophobic behaviour.

"The application process was very clear and straightforward. We were given a decision very promptly. We would also like to add how friendly and helpful everyone has been and look forward to working with Swap Shop again – thank you very much!"

Dorset Coppice Group

"A wide range of individuals from volunteers, community groups, community partnerships, countryside service all benefited from the day." Liveability Group, North Dorset DC

"You cannot have enough of this sort of training. It cuts through all the jargon and waffle that you come across every day in your workplace environment"



Developing skills and knowledge

Effective regeneration practice is essentially about communication, cooperation and understanding between all those involved. We have developed a flexible events and training programme which has focused on essential 'generic' skills, networking opportunities and fresh perspectives on regeneration. This programme has been developed in response to network members numerous requests to:

"make life simpler";

"increase learning and understanding of relationships between community, physical and economic regeneration";

"share experience and good practice in partnership working";

and "introduce cutting edge practice and new thinking in sustainable communities".

Events and Training

Since the official launch of the network, a total of around 1,850 participants have taken part in events organised or supported by RSWN and our 'Participation fund' has ensured that the events are accessible and affordable for all.

Below is a selection of the events and training. For a full listing of all the events (and summaries), please see the networking pages on www.creatingexcellence.org.uk

January - April 05

Introducing regeneration (Somerset, Devon, Wiltshire)

July 05

Collaborative working for successful regeneration (Devon, Somerset, Dorset)

October 05

creating:communities conference study tours (all in Plymouth)

- 1) New communities – Plymstock Quarry development
- 2) Flagship projects – Royal William Yard development
- 3) Sustainable neighbourhoods tour
- 4) Building sustainable communities through joint environmental action – changing places, changing lives in Plymouth's rural-urban fringe

Sept/Oct/Nov 05

Speaking with impact (Cornwall, Gloucestershire, Devon)

Jan/Feb '06

Essential evaluation (Wiltshire, South Gloucestershire, Devon)

March '06

Meaningful meetings, effective events (Gloucestershire, Devon)

March - May'06

Making social inclusion work (action learning set), (Somerset)

April and July '06

Fresh perspectives on sustainable communities (Lunchtime seminars with guest speakers, Devon)

May/June '06

Networking or not-working (network development surgeries) (Somerset, Cornwall)

July '06

Essential leadership skills (Somerset)

In summary, RSWN key areas of activity have been as follows:

- Independently or in partnership, providing or identifying affordable events, training, networking opportunities or information relevant to network members' learning requirements.
- Identifying and seeking buy-in with 'champions' and 'connectors' across key networks in the region.
- Providing a useful web resource offering a 'cross-network' of people, organisations or networks in and outside the region, in addition to sourcing technical know-how and good practice materials.
- Acting as a key sign-post to know-how and know-who and importantly, as the network has steadily grown, retaining a level of interaction with network members. The expectation has been for members to share experience and knowledge.
- Providing an opportunity to build the capacity of key emerging networks (at a local, sub-regional or regional level).



About the project host: South West Forum

South West Forum is the regional voice for the voluntary and community sector - influencing regional policy and strategy and promoting the development of the sector in the South West. During 2003, in partnership with Black South West Network and supported by GOSW, we organised a series of cross sector networking events, set up the web site and published newsletters and briefing papers to get the Regeneration Network off the ground. We were able to expand and develop this work over the next two years - working increasingly closely with creating:excellence as this too was launched. South West Forum played an active role in establishing creating:excellence and continues to be represented on its board.

We have led the development of Regeneration South West Network because voluntary and community groups play a crucial but frequently unrecognised and poorly supported role in regenerating and improving our communities. We firmly believe that the interchange of ideas and the sharing of experience, understanding and learning amongst people across all sectors, across all disciplines and across geographical boundaries is essential for a stronger voluntary and community sector and more sustainable communities. For more information visit www.southwestforum.org.uk or tel 01392 823758

And the future....

RSWN has been invaluable to the ongoing development of creating:excellence as the regional centre of excellence for sustainable communities. Their aim is to build the skills and knowledge of people working for sustainable development, regeneration, and renewal across South West England. To meet the needs of such a diverse group of people the organisation links learning and networking activity across Design, Evidence, and Funding arenas.

Responsibility for continuing the success of the network rests with creating:excellence, and all RSWN's work is housed on the web site (www.creatingexcellence.org.uk).

RSWN members will continue to receive news of activities, developments and learning opportunities through creating:excellence and will receive support from the new Learning and Development Manager who will manage the continued development of services for network members. Indeed, this work is already well underway. Current and planned learning and networking opportunities include:

- Real ways of learning, a series of experience based development opportunities
- Raising our game, a career analysis and development tool for sustainable communities practitioners
- An in-depth introduction to sustainable communities learning programme
- Master class style seminars offering fresh perspectives on key issues, utilising expertise from within the network's own membership.

A network programme will be delivered through the web site that continues to work towards:

- High quality information (around policy developments, practice, learning and funding opportunities)
- Support from others, and a clear channel of communication between policy development and regeneration in practice.

The goal is for practitioners to not only be aware of how they can participate and benefit from the work of creating:excellence, but also to be fully aware and able to access support and learning networks at their local level.

for more
information, visit
www.creatingexcellence.org.uk
or tel 0800 328 3234



GOVERNMENT OFFICE
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