

# 7 Ingredients for a just, fair and inclusive Transition



Photo: Simon Maggs.

**By Catrina Pickering**  
**Transition Network**



**A Transition Network guide**

## Why this booklet?

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Between March 2010 and September 2011, Catrina Pickering worked as Transition Network's Diversity Co-ordinator. Her role was to look at how Transition initiatives were doing in terms of diversity and inclusion and to develop tools and resources to support them in becoming better at it. She ran workshops and trainings around the country, and has really helped to bring the issue to the fore. We felt that it was really important that the lessons she had learnt, and the insights that she shared with Transition initiatives in her workshops, weren't lost, but were rather captured in an accessible format so that Transition initiatives could make use of them. This booklet draws together the key insights, which we hope, as the Transition movement continues to grow and deepen, will become a cornerstone of their activities. Our deepest thanks to Cat for so clearly and accessibility laying out not just the challenges, but also the tools and resources at our disposal.

Rob Hopkins, Transition Network.

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## Ingredient 1. Listening

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*"Man's inability to communicate is a result of his failure to listen effectively."*

*Carl Rogers*

*"Courage is what it takes to stand up and speak; courage is also what it takes to sit down and listen."*

*Winston Churchill*

*"If speaking is silver, then listening is gold."*

*Turkish Proverb*

The Roman (Greek-born) slave & Stoic philosopher Epictetus (55 AD - 135 AD) famously said "We have two ears and one mouth so we may listen more and talk less". We listen to understand and we listen to learn. What's the point of trying to give someone the skills to mend their clothes if you don't listen to them and find out that they'd actually rather learn to mend their bike? Why help someone get a solar panel on their roof if you don't listen to them and hear that actually what they really need is to stop the roof from leaking and letting out all the heat?



Taking time out on a Transition Training event.

Photo: Sophy Banks.

"By being listeners first, we can find common ground, common concerns, and common needs, as well as discovering what gifts each community member has to offer, and how to honour those gifts in a way that will encourage them to keep giving it, and to also focus on the common ground with us, even though we're new and weird and different. To do otherwise due to a sense that urgency is more important than connection, would be to lose everything that the Transition movement is about."

**Victoria Austin, Creekside Cultural Centre Transition, Pennsylvania**

Time and again, communities have regeneration money poured into them but are not asked what they want and need. They are not listened to. Because of this, time and again, communities – particularly vulnerable communities – have things done *to them* rather than *with them*.

When it comes to Transition, it's perhaps harder than ever to really listen. If you're passionate about climate change and peak oil, can you really hear the person that is saying "yes, but that's not top of my list right now, I've got to find the money to get my kids fed?"

When we really listen, we are able to find common ground and start from where people are at. Real listening is about being prepared to be changed by what we hear.

## **Transition in Action: Stopping to Listen before Starting to Act, Helena US**

In 2010, a small group of people in Helena, Montana, US sat down to talk about setting up a Transition initiative. Rather than design their first awareness-raising event, they instead made a list of local names drawn from the community. The list comprised of various leaders within renewable energy, food banks and homeless shelters, grocery stores, food growing/production, sustainable building, agency leaders, local pubs and bakeries, restaurants, elected officials, faith groups, teaching and school administrator fields.

They did this to try and understand what the Transition picture already looks like in their community – how resilience is already playing out across Helena. They also felt this would be a good way to avoid stepping on toes or alienating an important potential partner. This second aspect becomes very important in the U.S. because politics and social change models often revolve around coalition building. This is how you build your power base to bring about change, and it's also how you mobilise volunteers around issues.

They divided up the list of names and each person then contacted the people identified to ask them if they'd be willing to be interviewed. They did about 30 interviews in the beginning, and anticipated that each interview would take about 2 hours of their time. This is to set up the interview, conduct the interview, and then enter it into a shared database. Questions included "Do you see climate change and peak oil as an issue that affects Helena – how so?, what does the term resiliency mean to you?, and how can we help you or your organization with what you're doing?"

Jesse Peterson, from the Transition initiative, Helena 2020, explains: "The interview itself was a highly connective piece of the work. When you are asking a person these kinds of questions and really listening to their answers it can be very powerful. People working on their own set of issues that may or may not fit in with a Transition Town per se or who may or may not feel the term resonates for them are still drawn in after a conversation like this. With an interview, you also become aware of the words people do like to use and you can uncover barriers and assumptions that might hinder the work later if you weren't careful ahead of time."

"We had some great discussions during our interviews, and the leaders of the various sectors were keen to pull together a larger forum. I believe the initial steps are key to understanding the complicated web of a community and all the assets we have related to transitioning away from peak oil dependency."

## Transition in low income Glasgow communities by Luci Ransome, Glasgow Transition Support Worker

Low income communities are at the sharp end of change, and so they tend to be ready and resourceful enough to embrace sustainable and resilient ways to thrive, despite their poverty, health and employment problems. The skills and confidence needed for change are those required to turn hobbies and volunteering into jobs. Examples include growing and cooking more food, reusing electrical and household items, composting/waste systems, whatever will help that community invest in its people and future in a self-sustaining way.



Touring Love Milton's new community garden using reclaimed wood, Milton, Glasgow. Photo: Luci Ransome.

What I have seen is that personal, group and community needs in low income communities areas are more likely to be met sustainably when there are cross-regional support networks with similar projects. These networks help share ideas fast and offer hard-to-change communities support in their long journey. This is what I am seeing as helpful to a group of low income communities I work with across Glasgow. All 6 are active in community change and some more so around proactive low carbon living (with differing levels of interest in Transition) bringing a diversity of environmental, social and economic development experience. This is what Transition is well designed to do: be an adaptive and playful approach for use in any setting, that helps reveal the needs and resources of a community to plan, adapt and implement together how to truly thrive

This year we set up a Community Practice Group to share the learning from the practice of sustainability in low income communities. We meet every 8 weeks, have a mini tour of the host project and then share challenges, opportunities and understanding. Notes are written up and actions in between followed up. One group member sums it up like this: "You lose a bit of heart, you question what you're doing. It helps gee up the troops when you hear that what you're doing is positive; it is a good form of therapy". Having this group means we don't each have to reinvent the wheel every time, we can share skills and resources whilst building rapport, confidence whilst saving valuable time and money. It also means we aren't having to do it alone, we are sharing the burden and the rewards, of which there are many, but we are also learning by sharing together whilst meeting our deep need for connection. The groups that are participating in this live experiment are:

- Dumbarton Road Corridor Environmental Project in the west
- Love Milton in the north east
- The Concrete Garden and Depot Arts in the north
- Playbusters in the east
- Urban Roots in the south
- Govan Together in the south west of the city

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Creating a community orchard in Brockley Park, London. Credit: Alex Crane.

### **Tools for Transition: The Coaching Approach**

The New Economics Foundation uses the ‘coaching approach’ to encourage ground up community engagement which leads to activity that is owned by a group and is at a sustainable place.

This approach is difficult to describe because it is more about an attitude which many will adopt without giving it this label but it is based on facilitating a deeper kind of listening rather than imposing solutions. It is about facilitating a genuinely collaborative approach. Two key aspects stand out. They are:

- The start point is that everyone is ‘creative, resourceful and whole’.
- Following ‘the energy’ of the group.

The start point then is a position of respect for each and every person present. “Following the energy” means listening to where the real interest and passion of the individual or group lies, and supporting that, regardless of whether that might seem the most ‘logical’ route. Essentially, it is an approach that listens to the collective voice of the group rather than simply the dominant voices. A genuinely collaborative approach. If there is a ‘better’ route that will become clear - this is a learning process, it is not about what is right or wrong. One way to know if you are following the energy is if all the work seems to be generated by you, if it feels like you are pushing something uphill.

### **Some resources that can help with the coaching approach include:**

- Listening habits:  
[http://www.pluggingtheleaks.org/downloads/ccvc/ccvc\\_listening\\_habits.doc](http://www.pluggingtheleaks.org/downloads/ccvc/ccvc_listening_habits.doc).
- The 4 A’s challenge (Abilities, Assets, Attitudes, Action):  
[http://www.pluggingtheleaks.org/downloads/abee/abee\\_4a%27s.doc](http://www.pluggingtheleaks.org/downloads/abee/abee_4a%27s.doc).

## Ingredient 2. Meeting everyday needs

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*“...a human condition characterized by the sustained or chronic deprivation of the resources, capabilities, choices, security and power necessary for the enjoyment of an adequate standard of living and other civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights.”*

*United Nations official definition of poverty, 2001.*

An important question for Transition groups working with low income communities is how can people even begin to think about building resilience against the future impacts of peak oil and climate change if their fundamental needs are not being met in the here and now?

### What are our fundamental needs?

Although our wants and desires may vary, we all ultimately hold the same basic needs in common. According to the Development Specialist, Max-Neef, there are nine basic, fundamental needs: subsistence, protection, affection, understanding, participation, leisure, creation, identity, freedom. These are very useful to bear in mind when planning Transition projects. We could imagine a localisation process that is patriarchal, feudal and disempowering, or one that is the opposite. It is vital that from the outset, projects are built on the right foundations.



Promoting the Brixton Pound at the Urban Green Fair in Brockwell Park, London. Photo: Mary Linley.

### The urgency vs. patience tight-rope

Perhaps one of the biggest challenges to Transition is that we live in a world where many people are not able to meet their fundamental needs. Take the pensioner who is having to survive alone and is struggling against an ever-increasing cost of living. How can Transition help her to get better insulation so that she doesn't have to pay such high fuel bills and she doesn't then have to choose between staying warm or staying fed? Or what about the parent who is doing all she can to keep her children fed but worries when they go out to play? How can Transition help secure safer environments for her children to play in?

As Luci Ransome from Transition Glasgow says, “If there's a whole raft of people who are not doing Transition because it doesn't make sense to them, it makes me wonder, what then would Transition look like if it did make sense to them? Could it be that Transition's starting point is much broader? It might look at affordable fuel bills, access to good food for everyone, decent play areas for the next generation and sustainable, affordable transport to get out of your community.”

People who do not have their needs met are also often the people most vulnerable to effects of climate change and peak oil. We therefore need to act quickly to avert catastrophic climate change and peak oil but we also need to work with patience to ensure that resilience is built from the starting point of everyone's present day realities. It's a tightrope walk, but a

walk that needs to be taken if we are to build resilience across the breadth of our communities.

### **The resilience of poverty**

Poverty is not just about money. It is something that seeps into every layer of a person's life. From health to access to good food and from access to education to the freedom to choose where one lives, there is not an area left untouched. Poverty eats away at a person's capacity to meet their fundamental needs. And yet, at the same time, the desire to survive brings with it its own resourcefulness and creativity. As Max Neef says "(When you're in poverty) you cannot be an idiot if you want to survive. Every minute, you have to be thinking, what next? What do I know? What trick can I do here? What's this and that, that, that, that? And so, your creativity is constant."<sup>i</sup>

This creativity and resourcefulness feeds into strong networks of cooperation and mutual aid. For example, according to Oxfam, in the UK mutual exchanges of help from giving advice, to looking after children to DIY are more than twice as likely to happen in low income areas as they are in more affluent areas<sup>ii</sup>. The question then becomes how can Transition work with people who are struggling to meet their needs both to help them meet their needs in the present and to learn from them about resilience?

#### **Fuel poverty**

In the UK more people die from the cold each year than in Siberia. This is likely due to poorly insulated housing in the UK with 16% of households in fuel poverty. Fuel poverty is where a household spends more than 10% of their household income on home energy bills such as heating and electricity. In the UK, the highest proportion of people in fuel poverty are in the private rented sector where lack of investment in energy efficiency coupled with lower average incomes leads to 18% of households in fuel poverty.

There is an unjust situation where some people on lower incomes live in some of the most energy inefficient homes and cannot access the best energy prices. Due to the relative absence of savings available for investment, the fuel poor tend to have less options (such as feed in tariffs) open to them than others. This is a growing problem in the UK at least as the rising cost of oil prices coupled with the impacts of the recession are likely to push more households into fuel poverty this winter (2011-2012).

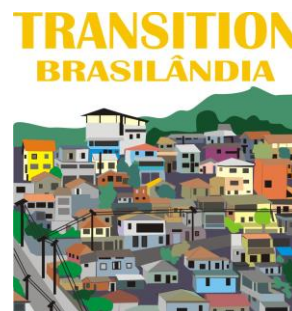
There are a number of initiatives underway to help fuel poor people combat fuel poverty. For example, Transition Belsize offers ongoing free workshops to residents to teach them the skills needed to fit tried and tested draught proofing products to insulate against cold draughts from windows and doors in their homes<sup>1</sup>. Windows for example account for 18% of the heat loss in a home so the savings in money can be quite substantial over time.

Meanwhile, in Totnes, the Transition Streets project<sup>1</sup> brought together 53 groups of friends and neighbours (over 500 households) to learn about saving energy and money in the home over a 3-5 month period. Each group was asked to follow an easy-to-understand workbook that has lots of simple ways to change how we use energy, water, food, packaging and transport. Many of the groups were themselves on low incomes. Government funding was also obtained to invest in solar PV across the town. 70% of the households that were fitted with solar PV were houses with lower disposable incomes.



## Transition in Action: Brasilândia – Resilience and Social Equity

Brasilândia consists of 17 slums in the northern region of São Paulo. It has 264,000 inhabitants and according to the Human Development Index (HDI) it has the highest rate of vulnerability among young people in São Paulo. Inspired by the Transition Towns methodology, Transition Brasilândia is the first example of a Transition community happening in such a low area of HDI and high vulnerability.



The heart of Transition Brasilândia is community engagement. Social actors from health, education, culture, economy, environmental sectors gather on a regular basis to dream, plan, implement and celebrate together local solutions to local issues, while focusing on the twin global challenges of peak oil and climate change.

One of the first actions of the initiating group was to map the territory, do a needs assessment and create a network of local stakeholders who shared information on assets as well as economic, social and health activities. Working groups were then established from the identified needs and aspirations and a celebratory unleashing event took place 9 months later with memorable international and national guests.



Photo: May East.

This has led to a wide range of practical projects on the ground in Brasilândia, including seven new community gardens, projects to strengthen the local economy, a very active zero waste initiative, and a great deal of practical sustainability education initiatives.

### Some words of Brasilândia community about Transition

Mr Quintino, is the president of the Ousadia Popular Movement that works to protect the rivers, waterfalls and forests of Brasilândia. He often posts short videos on youtube showing the degradation of environment in Brasilândia. Now, with Transition he believes that more people can understand the importance of his work, and the community is working to help him. "A plant like this in Brasilândia with volunteers was only possible because we have this movement of transition, which helps the people to mobilise for things, "he says.

For the health agents that work in the territory, Transition brought more consciousness and more knowledge about sustainability and resilience. "I grew up here and this is the first time I've seen things happen for real," says Thamires Ribeiro, environmental agent in the neighbourhood.

### Ingredient 3: Deepening inclusion

*"Good ideas are borne, not by suppression but by inclusion."  
Roland Gutierrez*

CABE's Decent Parks, Decent Behaviours report of 2005 found that although in the UK there is a common perception that ethnic communities do not tend to want to volunteer in public space activities, actually the reverse is true. 23% of BME people want to be more involved against only 9% of white people<sup>iii</sup>.

During my time in Transition, I have got to hear many stories from people who have felt excluded from it. On one occasion, I heard from a wheelchair user who wanted to go to her local Transition meetings but was unable to physically get into the buildings. She didn't feel comfortable writing to them and asking them to change the venue for her so she spent many months waiting for there to finally be an event with good physical access before she went along. In other cases, I've heard from people who have felt excluded because of their class, race, age or other such factors.



Amir, Brandon and Sam, helpers at Whitney Urban Farm Photo, Wilkinsburg (United States). Photo: Chris Condello.

But ensuring that your venues are physically accessible is really just the start to inclusion. If you ensure physical access but then exclude people by the language you use or the person you ignore, then you're only achieving a degree of inclusion. Individually, people can be very committed to ideas around diversity and inclusion but as a whole, they can form a culture that appears exclusive to others. All too often, this culture is drawn from the culture that is dominant in society. Those that are excluded by it are therefore also the people who tend to have less power or privilege in society. In an interview for Danielle Cohen's thesis "Reaching out for Resilience", a member of Transition Stoke Newington stated:

"It's quite hard being the only not-white person or something sometimes and I kind of, as well, feel like a lot of people have more maybe experience of talking and stuff like that and I'm not always very eloquent in my speech or whatever. I have really good ideas but I'm not always that great at saying them and putting them forward and... so I definitely didn't always feel that comfortable. And it wasn't because of even specifically, you know, people, but it was just like... I didn't feel like there were that many people like me.

"...I felt like as well if I brought my family or something there it would be...they would be disapproved of and it would be looked at as if they're not serious or they're not doing things in the right way because they're not taking notes... I don't think Transition Town Stoke Newington was in a place to...would have welcomed a whole new way of doing things. If you're, say, working class and you're around a lot of middle class people it makes you feel really stupid, you just do and especially when those people aren't that aware as well, so often we just wouldn't say anything."

Inclusion is about first understanding and then breaking down the barriers that prevent people from belonging and participating. Rather than creating a homogeneous culture that all too often is drawn from the dominant culture, it's about creating an environment in which all cultures and ways of being are welcomed. In the conclusion of her thesis, Danielle Cohen quoted the notes of one of her interviewees who said that "Transition should perhaps not be seeking to include others but should be seeking to be included by them". This seems like a good opening to look at the next key ingredient "Building Bridges".



Transition Llambed (Lampeter) produced posters for the same event in both English and in Welsh.

### Tools for Transition: Accessibility checklist

- ✓ **Venues:** Are the venues you use physically accessible to all? Would someone of any faith, race or culture feel OK about using your venue? If you like to meet in pubs, try to keep pubs just for some meetings or for some social events rather than as a staple, ongoing meeting space.
- ✓ **Language:** Do you try as far as possible to communicate in Clear English? See tool on Plain English.
- ✓ **Meeting style:** Are meetings conducted in a chaired meeting style? If so, is this accessible to everyone in your local community? What about break-out sessions, paired work?
- ✓ **Welcoming new people:** Are new people welcomed? Do you try to find out what their interests are, why they're here and do you try to help them find out how they might like to get involved?
- ✓ **Group process:** Are there individuals in your group who tend to dominate while others rarely if ever speak? Is there a smaller group within your group who hold a lot of power and always get their way? Check out these resources for working more effectively in groups:
  - Effective groups and meetings: <http://seedsforchange.org.uk/free/resources#grp2>.
  - Consensus decision making: <http://seedsforchange.org.uk/free/resources#grp>.
  - Conflict facilitation: <http://www.crnhq.org/allprods.php>,

## Strength in Diversity: Wisdom in Nature by Muzammal Hussain

*Wisdom in Nature* (WIN) is a contemplative ecological and community activist group, grounded in core Islamic principles. We have found that it is only when the walls that separate us can be softened, is it possible to begin real dialogue. This process of softening has the potential to be taken even further, reaching a place from where it can become easier to look at the world from another's viewpoint.



A Wisdom in Nature meeting. Photo: Wisdom in Nature.

When this process deepens within our group's meetings, a 'group mind', begins to form. Our personal awareness moves into something much bigger, something more open. The experience is not imaginary, but is palpable. One newcomer attending one of our review meetings described his experience, that the process "*seems to have a mind of its own*" - elaborating to mean that the answers naturally arrive.

Contributions emerging from this place bring with them a quality of inclusivity and carry a deeper truth; and through meetings we can feel energised rather than depleted! We begin to value one another as our collective wisdom is enriched by the presence of each person. Diversity becomes a strength that we naturally welcome.

In terms of specifics, we use basic ground rules, or a group agreement, that welcomes deep listening and a diversity of viewpoints as a start. In addition we include a variety of ways to support this further. For example, after we have settled a little, we join together for a couple of minutes silence - as a means of letting go of some of the mental baggage we have each brought in! At key meetings we can also bring in active exercises. These can be as simple as asking a question or two, "What are the qualities that bring us to the group?", or "How do we see the state of the world?" to give a couple of examples. By opening this up to allow for *all* ideas including seemingly conflicting ones, and ensuring each is acknowledged and noted e.g. visibly on a flip chart, it makes it easier for each person to step into other shoes. The process of developing a group mind is under way.

As part of our 'Islamic Community Food Project' in Tower Hamlets, in which we attempted to integrate social organising with connecting to the land, we used an exercise that involved throwing the following statement to the group: "*It is selfish for the middle class to think about the food they eat when millions of people are starving*". Participants were then asked to position themselves in the room according to how much or how little they believed the statement to be true. The different voices were then drawn out and participants were also free to move should their perspective shift. I must confess that although we are keen to draw more people from less privileged background into WIN, we have not had as much success as we would have liked. However, in small ways we experience some fruits of our work in the area of rank and privilege.

<http://wisdominnature.blogspot.com/>

### Tools for Transition: Clear Language

Language is an area of inclusion that needs to be consistently worked on. How do you explain complex concepts such as peak oil and climate change while also making it accessible to all?

The Plain English Campaign offers several tools including an introductory tool<sup>1</sup> on communicating in clear, accessible English. Tips include using shorter sentences, using everyday language in place of legal words or jargon and imagining you are talking directly to the reader rather than writing something.

Here are a few before and after examples taken from the Plain English website<sup>1</sup>:

Before: High-quality learning environments are a necessary precondition for facilitation and enhancement of the ongoing learning process.

After: Children need good schools if they are to learn properly.

Before: If there are any points on which you require explanation or further particulars we shall be glad to furnish such additional details as may be required by telephone.

After: If you have any questions, please phone.



Members of Transition Town Tooting with local MP Sadiq Khan at the annual Tooting Foodival, and with some trial 'Toots', a proposed local currency for the area. Photo: Transition Town Tooting.

## Ingredient 4: Building Bridges

*If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go further, go together”.*  
*African proverb.*

*“We are here to awaken to the illusion of our separateness”*  
*Thich Nhat Hanh*

*“I feel I’ve lived more deeply in my community in the past 2 years since I’ve been involved in Transition than I have in the previous 20 years of living here”.*  
*Participant in Transition Tooting*



Transition Kensal to Kilburn's 'community allotment' on the platform of Kilburn Underground station. Photo: Chris Wells.

There is more that brings us together than that which separates us. The world over, we all need food to eat, we all grieve when our loved ones die, we all thirst for happiness.

Transition is a process based on building trust and looking to the good that it presumes people will bring to the process. And yet, in the UK, less than 30% believe that “most other people can be trusted”. It’s worse in Singapore, where it’s just under 20%, and in Portugal, it’s just 10%. Both Singapore and Portugal have some of the highest rates of income inequality. In general, in countries that have a higher level of income equality, there are

higher levels of trust<sup>iv</sup>. Given this, how can Transition succeed in building resilience if it doesn’t build friendship and trust across all “barriers”?

### **“Us” and “them”**

*“There are two sorts of people in the world; those who divide people into two types, and those who don’t!” Edward A Murphy Jr.*

Often people talk about “us” and “them”. Talking about groupings isn’t a bad thing in itself but it can very quickly lead to talking about in-groups and out-groups. An example of this is that Transition is often described as being “white and middle-class” and yet I have met many people who are part of Transition and feel excluded by being described as white and middle-class. They do not feel their life experience can be boxed up into these categories.

This kind of “us” and “them” or “othering” comes about as a result of focusing on the things that set us apart rather than the things that bind us together. More often than not, “us” and “them” also implies that “we” are dominant and they are “subordinate”. Often there is talk of “reaching out” to bring people into “our” agenda. This approach rarely results in genuine engagement but more a one-way pledge of a group of people to convert “the others”.

In 2008, Rebecca Brewin, founder of a contemplative Christian-based community and local resident in Vauxhall, London was teaching yoga to a group of Muslim women and found herself wondering how she could build on her relationships with the women and foster inter-cultural and inter-faith dialogue. Working closely with Sadaat Yusaf, one of the Muslim women from the group, she began to build connections with Transition Brixton, a local food foraging project called Invisible Food, the local council and a church lay preacher.



Photo: LIFE.

Out of this emerged LIFE (Local Initiatives for Faith and Environment), a project aimed at building a bridge between women of different faith groups and activities exploring the local environment in the London borough of Lambeth.

From 2009-2011, a small creative core of women from Muslim, Christian, Buddhist and ecological backgrounds took root and emerged from the urban soil. A web of connections and friendships started to form through the forum of monthly themed events which introduced a widening circle of women to a range of topics, from reforming old tetrapaks into colourful purses to the fascinating history of common land, as well as visits to existing food-growing projects and community gardens. The sharing of food, spirituality and a growing sense of inter-connections formed a staple aspect of each meeting.

LIFE revealed that hearing personal stories about people's relationship with the environment was a vital place to start. Inviting people to contemplate how their sense of connection or disconnection related to their psychological and mental wellbeing made a significant difference to the way they related to the project.

As the project developed, LIFE explored more deeply how action that improves the environment and our relationship with it has an effect on how we perceive others and our own lives. They started to look at how the 'spiritual' and the 'sensual' have been split in an increasingly secularised culture. The women grew in confidence in voicing how they felt this 'split' in their own lives and communities, and how digging a plot of land or learning about recycling or wild food-foraging changed their relationship with this feeling of fragmentation, or not belonging.

The results of LIFE have been manifold and indeed life-giving: the grounding of friendship and the spacious horizon of new, shared vision. As one of the LIFE participants said "I've been living in South London all my life and yet through the LIFE project, I've got to visit places I've never been to before and got to meet people I never would have met". Plans for the future? The LIFE project has recently formed a committee and is looking at next steps for LIFE with ideas likely to be taken forward including securing a local community garden and getting funding to support other groups across the UK to build their own LIFE groups. They've also developed a LIFE resource to help local groups set up their own LIFE groups available from Rebecca Brewin, LIFE Coordinator, [Rebecca@handtoearth.net](mailto:Rebecca@handtoearth.net).

### **Tools for Transition: Mapping connections**

Here's an exercise for mapping the existing "bridges" or connections you have within your Transition group. This exercise is best done in groups of 4-6.

- Take a piece of flipchart and sit around it together in your group with two differently coloured markers.
- In the centre of the paper, write your names or the name of your Transition initiative.
- Using a spider diagram format, write down names of groups, institutions or initiatives that you know of in your Transition area. It might be a local faith house, the local school, council, the football club, tenants group and so on.
- Using another colour pen, write down any people or "bridges" you know in that group.
- Often groups are quite surprised by the number of connections they do have in their communities between them. Take a step back and look at what you've done then discuss which connections you'd particularly like to follow up on.

### **Tools for Transition: Connecting**

Having done the exercise above, if you find that you want to connect with a group but don't have a bridging person to connect you then try the following steps:

**Step 1:** Identify who you'd like to connect with.

**Step 2:** If you're nervous about connecting with this group then help yourself by finding out a bit more about them. For example, if you'd like connect with your local mosque then find out a bit more about Islam – read about the religion, research the structure in a mosque, find out about the mosque's local activities. Having done a bit of research, remember that you don't need to know everything. If you don't know what to do in a situation, people are unlikely to be offended if you just ask for example "shall I take my shoes off or leave them on?"

**Step 3:** Contact the group and ask if you can go along to dialogue with them. Tell them who you are and what your group is interested in but make it clear that you want to hear from them too. Go along to listen and ask questions – take an open mind and heart with you as your ally.

**Step 4:** Reflect with the group and build possible activities together.

**Step 5:** Reflect on the work you've co-created.

**Step 6:** Keep the connection alive through ongoing communication and activities.



## Ingredient 5: Celebration

*"Diversity is the one true thing we all have in common. Celebrate it every day".*  
Unknown

*"It is time for parents to teach young people early on that in diversity there is beauty and there is strength."*  
Maya Angelou

Diversity opens the door to celebrating the different ways we have of expressing the things that we hold in common. Celebration enables people to comfortably move out of their comfort zone. Celebration enables people to revel in life and creative expression.

Many celebrations have been born out of freedom and diversity, particularly in times of great injustice and inequality. For example, the UK Notting Hill Carnival began in Trinidad when the first carnival was held in 1833 to mark an end to slavery in the Caribbean. In response to the grave racial tensions, poor housing and lack of work opportunities, they were experiencing in 1950s London, the Caribbean community in Notting Hill (an area of London) envisioned a celebration that would uplift the community.

The first carnival took place in 1964, encouraging people, both black and white, to go onto the streets and express themselves socially as well as artistically. Today it is well-known the world over and attracts many hundreds of thousands of people each year.



Young people pedal their elders through the streets of Tooting as part of the Trashcatchers' Carnival, summer 2010. Photo: Simon Maggs.



Transition Llambed's lantern procession. Photo: Transition Llambed.

Drawing on these ideas, Transition has already organised a number of diverse cultural celebrations such as the infamous Tooting Trashcatchers Carnival in London which brought the diverse cultures of Tooting, South London together in a celebration made entirely of waste. The Christmas Lantern festival held in Llambed in 2010 brought Welsh and English children and their parents together to make their own lanterns and form a parade around the town.

## Transition in Action case study: Transition Leytonstone Green Winter-faith Festival

At the beginning of February, South Leytonstone's Epicentre was the venue for a faith-inspired weekend celebration of sustainable living, with food, hospitality and entertainment. Transition Leytonstone hosted the two-day event in partnership with Sacred Roots, a Muslim-led organisation promoting interfaith dialogue through arts and culture.



Aiming to make the events programme socially inclusive, culturally varied and engaging, we strove together to deliver a mixture of environmental information and entertainment. Stalls selling eco-books, home-made jam and marmalade, olive oil and other products from Palestine, and Fairtrade goods were there on both days, and there was a seed sowing table. We ensured that children were catered for, with a special workshop provided on both days.

On day one, we featured talks by Polly Higgins, 'The Planet's Lawyer' and Jagdeesh Singh from the Sikh Environment Network, both of which focused on the vital importance of planetary custody for all. These talks were well received by the public: the Mayor of Waltham Forest visibly enjoyed himself and assured Polly that Earth Hour (a day in March each year in which millions turn their lights off for one hour to take a stand against climate change) would be observed at Walthamstow Town Hall.

Later in the day we had a story-telling session, a book launch: Green Spirituality by Chris Philpott from Transition Leamington Spa, and a screening of A Farm for the Future. These were followed by a vegetarian buffet provided jointly by the Hornbeam Organic Café and the Star of India, a Leytonstone restaurant now sourcing organic vegetables locally. A concert in the evening featured our own poetry group: E11 Eco, and another local performer, 'EnviroMentalist' Other Theresa, alongside well-known musicians from many cultures and traditions, including Ameer Khan, On the D and Flux Collective.

On Sunday the focus was more on the food! Anton Rosenfeld from Garden Organic spoke about growing 'exotic' vegetables in the UK, and Gillian Livingstone from Transition Crouch End told us about their food growing and apple picking projects. Afterwards we held a series of round tables on food choices – a chance to find out why people eat Halal, Kosher, vegan, organic, local or Fairtrade, and to exchange information in an informal setting.

Sunday's activities culminated in a multicultural feast with vegetarian food provided by a variety of local people. Many of the ingredients were sourced locally from Organiclea, a food growing co-operative based in Chingford. It was a sitdown meal, and the menus were a 'feast of conversation', with starter, main and dessert topics to choose from. I've no idea how far this was followed, but I didn't hear anyone talking about football!

It was definitely a worthwhile event and was described by one participant as having a "lovely community feel, with so many people offering performances - music, poetry, story-telling, and joining in generally" and another said "loved the mix of people - music, poetry more of this!"

## Ingredient 6: Exploring rank and privilege

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*"I feel my heart break to see a nation ripped apart by its own greatest strength--its diversity."*

*Melissa Etheridge*

*"The oppressor must be liberated just as surely as the oppressed...I am not truly free if I am taking away someone else's freedom just as surely as I am not free when my freedom is taken away from me.. The oppressed and the oppressor alike are robbed of their humanity."*

*Nelson Mandela*

### What is rank?

Rank can be described as the sum of a person's privileges. It can be conscious or unconscious, learned or inherited and it changes with each situation you find yourself in. Rank can be described as being made up of four factors<sup>1</sup>



**Social Rank:** One has more or less rank based on whether or not one identifies with or is seen as part of a dominant group in society. Race, gender, age, economics, nationality, religion, sexual orientation, education, health, language are all factors that determine our social rank.

**Structural rank:** Structural rank is often found in groups with clearly identifiable rank structures such as manager, team leader etc. However, structural rank can also be unspoken – we know who are leaders are, whose opinions are respected and those that are disregarded.

**Psychological rank:** Psychological rank is not given to us from culture, but it is an experience that one works towards or acquires. It is a sense of feeling secure and cared for. It comes from surviving suffering and coming out stronger and more compassionate. People with a lot of psychological rank have much awareness, self-knowledge or self-esteem. They are often able to speak and express themselves even in the midst of great social powers and can tolerate tension without falling apart.

**Spiritual rank:** Spiritual rank is also independent of culture, family and the world. It comes from a sense of being connected and centred with a sense of "justice on your side". People with much spiritual rank often are community builders with an uncanny ability to bring groups together and may radiate a sense of wellbeing and calm that relaxes people.

And yet, as Nelson Mandela points out above, whatever our rank or privilege we are all harmed by the walls of rank that divide us. Given that, how do we build a movement that goes beyond rank to unleash our collective genius?

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<sup>1</sup> Extracted from handouts from a workshop by Gary Reiss and Julie Diamond.

Perhaps one way is to adopt a shifting leadership that recognises that at different times and very often from moment to moment, different individuals are needed to lead the way. This is the kind of leadership that acknowledges that we are all leaders that are trying to do something about the passivity many of us have been trained into. But how do we achieve this? The first step is to become aware of whatever rank we have. As process worker, Arnold Mindell says “Any power, good or bad, if not recognised, can become oppressive and harmful.” And yet when you recognise your rank, you can use it to your own benefit and that of others as well.

### **Tools for Transition: Reflecting on your rank**

By yourself or in small groups of up to 5, reflect and discuss:

- Some of your sources of rank and power. If you feel you generally have a lot of privilege, you might want to work through the exercise “unpacking the invisible knapsack<sup>1</sup>” to explore this further.
- Ways in which you feel your rank makes it difficult for you to speak out or to be heard
- How do you or might you use your rank in sustainable ways? Is there a way you could use your rank in relationships, in the world, to be more sustainable and to create a more sustainable world?
- What rank and power issues are present in groups you are working with? What could be done to help people in these groups to use their rank for everyone’s benefit?

### **Tools for Transition: Practical ideas for overcoming domination in groups**

1. Practice noticing who’s in the room at meetings – what kinds of rank do people hold and how do they use it?
2. Notice the culture of the room – does it reflect the dominant culture of society? For example, if in the UK, the dominant culture is white and middle class, does everyone in the room, regardless of their rank, relate to one another through this culture? What can be done to help your group develop a deeper diversity that embraces many different cultures at once?
3. Count how many times you speak and keep track of how long you speak.
4. Count how many times other people speak and keep track of how long they speak.
5. Be conscious of how often you are actively listening to what other people are saying as opposed to just waiting your turn thinking about what you’ll say next. Keep a notebook so that you can write down your thoughts and then focus on what other people are saying.
6. Pay attention to how many times you put ideas out to the group you work with and notice how often you support other people’s ideas for the group.
7. Think about whose work and what contributions to the group get recognised. Is there a reason for this? How might people feel whose contributions to the group aren’t usually recognised?
8. Practice asking more people what they think about events, ideas, actions, strategy and vision.
9. Struggle with the saying, “you will be needed in the movement when you realize that you are not needed in the movement”.

## Ingredient 7: Embedding Diversity

*"I do not want my house to be walled in on all sides and my windows to be stifled. I want all the cultures of all lands to be blown about my house as freely as possible. But I refuse to be blown off my feet by any."*

*Mohandas K. Gandhi*



The 2011 reissue of the Brixton Pound, a complementary currency scheme in south London, featuring characters from the area's history and culture.

Transition Town Tooting (TTT) is often celebrated as being a great example of a Transition initiative that works across and with the diversity of the community. For TTT, diversity is an approach and a way of working. It is threaded through every project, every event and every conversation they have. It is embedded in the very fabric of their mission.

If we are to build a truly inclusive and equitable Transition, perhaps the most important ingredient we need to take away is that of threading a commitment to diversity and social justice through everything we do.

### Diversity in Action: Embedding Diversity in BTCV



BTCV (British Trust for Conservation Volunteers) started talking about diversity and inclusion about ten years ago. By that time, they'd already been going for 40 years. In those days, it was focused very rurally and also very much on people who were already interested in and doing conservation. By 2008, 44% of all the people they worked with came from under-represented communities.

With this shift, they also moved from being primarily a bio-diversity organisation to being a people organisation that uses bio-diversity as a vehicle for broader sustainable development activities that benefit people. You can't have sustainable development if it's not equitable. When I spoke to Miles Sibley, the Development Director at BTCV, he told me that he felt that most environmental orgs are partly struggling with inclusivity and partly not struggling. Partly struggling because they are concerned about inclusivity and partly not because they're not concerned enough to put it to the top of their agenda and actually then really start to do something about it.

One way to prioritise this problem is to write a commitment to diversity and inclusion into your Transition initiative so that it becomes something that is central to everything we do. In August 2011, Transition Network started a discussion on the Transition Network website about adding inequality to our purpose statement so that inequality would become a central driver to Transition alongside peak oil and climate change. This discussion is ongoing and available to participate in at: <http://www.transitionnetwork.org/blogs/catrina-pickering/2011-09/inequality-transition-network-purpose-statement-discussion>.

## Transition in Action case study: Transition Finsbury Park

Finsbury Park in North London is one of the most ethnically and culturally diverse areas in the UK - immigrant populations have established a patchwork of internal groupings, based around geography, housing estates, cultural and religious identities. 62% of its residents live in areas ranked amongst the most deprived 10% in the country. The 2001 census shows that 30-40% of the population is 'economically inactive' and it has a long history of urban deprivation.



Transition Finsbury Park was established in November 2008 and has embedded a strong diversity and inclusion approach throughout its work. Rather than start food growing projects in gardens cut off from the rest of the community, they did guerrilla gardening and planted edible plants in public places such as the local doctor's surgery, the park, the church, the library, the school and by one of the train stations. They tried to build relationships with the mosques by holding workshops for children that explored the children's relationship with the local area.

As a couple of the core group members were also parents who sent their children to the local primary school, they set up a cycle training workshop at the local school mostly attended by Turkish mums. They hold an annual, family friendly "Well Oiled" festival in Finsbury Park, the centre of the community and they are now setting up "Edible Landscapes" a social enterprise aimed at increasing the availability of affordable, local food and local skills around food growing, particularly involving people with mental health needs.



Photo: Transition Finsbury Park.

Their aim is now to educate people about low-maintenance food growing. They have free informal sessions twice a week where passers-by wander in from the park to see their well-labelled showcase bed. Lots of local people are already familiar with gardening but don't have access to their own growing space so this goes some way towards satisfying that urge to grow. They are also soon to be taking referrals of adults with learning disabilities from a local college.

Jo Homan, Founder of Transition Finsbury Park says "We were always reluctant to go for the "low lying fruit" – the traditional environmentalists – when getting people involved as it was obvious that this would be a barrier to proper inclusion. It is still a struggle to find people with the time, capability, commitment and enthusiasm to take part. However, our approach has been partially successful in that we have a couple of people taking leadership or project management roles who aren't from the traditional mould and we manage to include a good diversity of people at our events".

## Tools for Transition: Embedding Diversity and Social Justice

One way to embed diversity and social justice is to look at what your Transition projects will look like if you *do* embed diversity and social justice and if you *don't*. From there you can work out what you need to do to ensure that you do embed diversity throughout your Transition activities.

Here's an example:

### Transition XXX Building and energy group

**Description:** Transition group on building and energy that helps local residents to set up community renewables, put in place insulation, save money on energy and reduce overall carbon footprint of homes.

#### **If diversity and social justice *isn't* embedded:**

People who own their own homes in town XXX make up 52% of the population. As these people tend to have more freedom and money available to make adjustments to their homes that reduce their energy use and carbon footprint, the group decides to target these people. After all, they are the “low lying fruit”. A project is set up to support home-owners to take advantage of feed-in-tariffs which enable people to be paid for extra energy they produce from the renewables they install. The fact that the money used to pay for this comes from higher energy bills paid for by the people who can't afford renewables, is ignored.



This house in France is being retrofitted using strawbales. Using the same approach here could lead to new local businesses, skills and retraining. Photo: Yannick Molin.

**If diversity and social justice *is* embedded:** In addition to helping home-owners who have the freedom and often the income to invest in energy improvements on their homes, the group also looks at ways to help private and social tenants.

The group recognises that people who don't own their homes – particularly private tenants – are at high risk of fuel poverty as they often live in the least carbon efficient homes, pay proportionally more for their energy and have less freedom or financial resources to do anything about their situation.

The group looks at working with private tenants on putting in place community scale renewables, accessing grants for insulation where possible and working with local landlords to encourage them to invest. The group particularly also looks to help pensioners who are on low incomes and living in cold homes and people in rural areas outside the town who are off the gas grid and therefore more at risk of fuel poverty as they have to pay higher prices for oil and coal to heat their homes.

## Conclusion

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This toolkit outlines the bare bones of creating a just and fair Transition initiative – the rest is up to you. If you're still unsure of where to start, the important thing is that you make a start. That start should involve both an inner journey in which you commit to having a conversation with yourself on your fears about working together with everyone to create a just and fair Transition. This inner journey should be coupled with an outer commitment to going out to listen rather than waiting for people to come to you, to building collaborations and partnerships that enable you to be stronger than what you would be apart and to embed diversity and social justice in everything you do.

To find out more about Transition in general, visit the Transition Network website: [www.transitionnetwork.org](http://www.transitionnetwork.org).

To find out more about what other Transition initiatives are doing around diversity and inclusion, go to the Transition Network diversity and social justice sub-site: [www.transitionnetwork.org/diversity-and-social-justice](http://www.transitionnetwork.org/diversity-and-social-justice).

Use the site to tell your stories about what you are doing, your successes and failures. We all need to learn from each other.

And finally, don't forget to celebrate the strength in diversity that our world is so fortunate to have.

## Resources

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**Note: As Transition Network is based in the UK, we are most familiar with the UK network and so most of the resources below are UK based. We welcome hearing from organisations and resources based outside of the UK to inform our work in the future.**

### Organisations:

- Black Environment Network (works for ethnic participation in the environment): <http://www.ben-network.co.uk/>.
- Groundwork (environmental regeneration charity): [www.groundwork.org.uk](http://www.groundwork.org.uk).
- Encounters Arts (focuses on creating spaces and processes for people from all walks of life to re-look at who and how they are in the world at this time of ecological crisis and opportunity): <http://www.encounters-arts.org.uk/aboutus.htm>.
- BTCV (international conservation organisation with a good track record of working on diversity): <http://www2.btcv.org.uk/>.
- The Equality Trust (evidence based campaign working to reduce income inequality in order to improve the quality of life in the UK): <http://www.equalitytrust.org.uk>
- Capacity Global (environmental justice in urban areas): [www.capacity.org.uk](http://www.capacity.org.uk).
- National Communities Resource Centre (provides training and support to people on low incomes): <http://www.traffordhall.com/>
- Oxfam UK Poverty Programme: <http://www.oxfam.org.uk/resources/ukpoverty/>.
- Joseph Rowntree Foundation, Climate Change and Social Justice programme: [www.jrf.org.uk/work/workarea/climate-change-and-social-justice](http://www.jrf.org.uk/work/workarea/climate-change-and-social-justice).



## Books/ Reports

- *Sitting in the Fire: Large group transformation using conflict and diversity.* Arnold Mindell
- *The Spirit Level: Why Equality is Better for Everyone.* Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett.
- *Hard to Reach? Diversity and Environment*, a report by Capacity Global: [http://www.capacity.org.uk/downloads/hard\\_to\\_reach\\_manifesto.pdf](http://www.capacity.org.uk/downloads/hard_to_reach_manifesto.pdf).
- *Principles of Environmental Justice: established at the First National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit held on October 24-27, 1991, in Washington DC*, <http://www.ejnet.org/ej/principles.html>.
- *Reaching out for Resilience: Exploring approaches to inclusion and diversity in the Transition movement:* <http://transitionculture.org/wp-content/uploads/DanielleCohen-MSc-HE-Thesis.pdf>.
- *Capacity Global Faiths and Environment Toolkit:* [http://www.capacity.org.uk/downloads/faith\\_and\\_environment\\_toolkit.pdf](http://www.capacity.org.uk/downloads/faith_and_environment_toolkit.pdf).

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## Endnotes

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<sup>i</sup> <http://tinyurl.com/3d8blj4>

<sup>ii</sup> <http://tinyurl.com/4yord9y>

<sup>iii</sup> <http://tinyurl.com/3mgkdqb>

<sup>iv</sup> Wilkinson, R, Pickett, K. (2010) *Spirit Level: Why Equality is Better for Everyone.* Penguin Books.

<sup>v</sup> Mindell, A. (1995) *Sitting in the Fire: Large Group Transformation using conflict and diversity.* Lao Tse Press