

Developing the London Time Bank Network

Sarah Burns and Claire Navaie

- Why do we want to tell you about networks?

Three reasons

Because we've reached the stage in our developments when we have a lot to learn from each other

Because we want to be bigger than the sum of our parts

Because we want to find ways of linking up with other organisations and approaches that can strengthen our approach – putting the 'problem' people at the heart of local services – whether it's health, education or housing

- Networks aren't new to time banks – they are it's very life blood – networks of people coming together for the common good – to help each other and build healthier, safer neighbourhoods

The Fair Shares network of time banks in Gloucestershire began life in 1998 – the first such network in the country, indeed the first time bank.

Growing out of the success of Fair Shares, has grown the Time Bank UK network, established in partnership with the New Economics Foundation in 2000 and now joined by consortia members in Wales and Scotland and independently launched as it's own organisation. As the network grows – with over 900 members and 55 time banks, one of the challenges facing us is how to grow strong regional networks - a task which all the consortia members plus the new directors are working hard on....

- Which takes us to London and the London Time Bank, launched last year and taking as it's starting point 3 core time banks in 3 different part of London – Lambeth, Lewisham and Southwark

We wanted to start a network for London because

Of course we wanted to support existing and help grown new time banks, we wanted to make sure that we learnt from each other and found ways to incentivise the help we can give each other

But we also recognised that there are some problems facing London – like poverty, crime and environmental degradation which can only be solved on a regional basis – through a network of communities or local neighbourhoods which are mobilising people to care and help themselves

I'm going to hand over to Claire Naviae, who will tell you about more about the nitty gritty of how the London Time Bank works

But before I do I want to just say that building networks isn't ever easy

So far though – and having been involved in developing several networks of time banks I think I can name the 3 vital ingredients to network building:

Communication, trust and celebration – over to you Claire

When I first started working at London Time Bank there were just three time banks up and running – being still quite new to London it took me nearly a month to remember where exactly Brixton, Peckham and Catford were.

Sixteen months on there are now 11 active time banks in London, with another 16 in development. And thankfully in this time my geography has vastly improved – I am now familiar with exotic locations such as Woolwich, Bow and Euston.

I really do have a fantastic job – I am always out and about on the bus or the tube visiting time banks or meeting people who would like to set up a time bank. I might be going belly dancing with a womens support group in Dalston or a to piano singsong at a sheltered accommodation in Waterloo or take part in a yoga class in Brixton.

Honestly everyone this is my job – sometimes I have to chastise myself for enjoying myself too much. And it's all in the name of time banking.

Sometimes it's not that easy – like the time I was asked to speak to some housing officers at their team meeting about how they could use time banking. I really had to do my best to ignore the officers that were obviously asleep. And the time when I put on my sweetest (or was it bravest) smile to chat with a group of 5 or 6 young men about time banking. The services they were offering weren't the sort you find on the Fair Shares cartoon questionnaire!

What I officially do at London Time Bank, with Sarah, is support the development the London Time Bank network.

It's been a steep learning curve for me and I have discovered so many things about people, including myself. What I would like to share with you is some of my experiences from the network.

For me the most important aspect of developing a network is having a strong focus on **personal networking**, this includes time and resources.

I really enjoy getting to know the time brokers and participants do this by doing a lot of outreach work. This might be in the shape of helping a time bank produce a newsletter, or helping make sandwiches for a social event.

Like time banking – any network has to be about giving and receiving. I have learnt that to be effective, formal relationships need to be rooted in informal processes of networking and are characterised by a sense of trust, co-operation and mutual advantage. I want the London network to be of genuine use to time banks – not just something that exists in name.

And of course there needs to be an opportunity to network through **social events**, I believe this lays the foundation for the development of effective networks. London Time Bank does this in a variety of ways – and we like nothing more than a good party.

In the summer, London Time Bank celebrated its first anniversary. A party was held in Brixton to celebrate and recognize everyone's achievements. The HourBank did the catering and pupils from a local school in Peckham performed ballet. Rose, a Rushey Green participant, sang two very moving old time songs and other Rushey Green participants blew up the balloons. Angell Towns young participants wrote and recited poetry for the occasion. Many of London's time banks had a stall with information about their activities and participants came along too and told their stories. It was everyone's contributions that made the day such a success. One Rushey Green participant certainly captured my feelings when she said on the way home *"I'm exhausted but I'd do it all over again"*.

The London network has also established a **forum for good practice and the exchange of experiences to facilitate learning across the network**. So every other month we have practitioners meetings. These meetings are a time for brokers to get-together and catch up on what their time banks have been up to. It's a time to share ideas and offer support and advice. For example, one broker was explaining that she simply could not get men to join the time bank. Another broker then admitted that

she was experiencing the same problem. Both of them said that they felt so much better to find out that they weren't the only with that challenge.

On another occasion one broker told the group she wanted to design a leaflet to advertise an event at her time bank but her IT skills weren't that advanced, so another broker offered to help her design the leaflet.

Individual time banks host the get-togethers so it makes the meetings more personal and, for me, a bit of an adventure going to a new part of London. And people bring some food along to share – someone even baked some fresh bread for a get-together (at 6am that morning). The get-togethers put faces to names and I do think that encourages people to make and keep contact. Brokers share plans which inspire others and offer advice on how they have solved similar challenges. I always come away so inspired and energized from these get-togethers.

And to **minimize barriers to participation** positive steps should be taken to include stakeholders in development discussion – otherwise you would have to ask yourself is there really a network? London Time Bank recently held its first stakeholders meeting. Over a lunch the London time brokers were able to discuss how the London network could develop. It was agreed that these meetings would become a regular fixture in our diaries as a way to build a strategic vision for the network.

London Time Bank is **strengthening the network** in other ways too, by:

- Supporting the development of borough based networks in London, where local time banks will be able to link up and share resources. Each borough would have a time bank connector whose job it is to make links with the wider community and seek out partnerships. This is already happening in Southwark and soon Islington. I think we all know it's better to work in co-operation as funding requirements often stress co-operation and partnership building. And we believe this is the way forward.

- London Time Bank is providing skill development such as workshops on how to set up and run a time bank with direct advice from experienced brokers and training on how to make the most of time keeper software (with UK time keeper expert Colin McGowan at the helm) and
- Encouraging the sharing of resources and information between time banks. For example an HourBank participant in Peckham translated a leaflet on time banking into Arabic for a womens support group in Islington. And at the London Time Bank training days we ask people to tell us one thing they want from the network, and people have asked for things such as case studies of time banks or examples of funding bids. London Time Bank is working towards meeting these requests. We also ask them for one thing they can offer the network, people have offered facilitation training or Spanish translation, for exampl. So this is enabling London Time Bank to build a bank of resources available to the network.

Some of the challenges that we have faced include something we all suffer from these days - too much work and not enough time to do it in. So I am very aware that it is difficult for people to get away from the office to come to network events or spend time digging out information for LTB statistics. To overcome this and to prevent resentment from members of the network it is vital to avoid duplication. So London Time Bank and Time Bank UK are working closely to share news and stories with each other too.

And some people have a different view as to what their network should be – some feel they would like to concentrate on a more local network, i.e. just within their borough, and some are keen to develop more links across the capital.

But by working together we are building a vibrant network for London that supports people to take an active and valued part in their community, but also finding ways to tackle issues such as lack of access to training opportunities and health inequalities.

There are lots of people here at the conference representing time banks from across London, so please do seek them out and find out about the imaginative ways they are using the time banking tool to build community.

Thank you.