TOOL 16

Participant, passenger, prisoner?
This exercise can be used flexibly within different contexts, eg as a stand-alone piece of work or as part of a facilitated session on visioning. Here, it’s presented as part of a visioning exercise. (Face-to-face with all partners together)

- At the beginning of the session, start by saying that you’re going to do an exercise called ‘the 3 Ps’ to establish where each person stands in relation to the process of collaboration (note that it’s each person and not organisation – you may have more than one representative from an organisation present and it’s important to get all points of view)

- Ask participants to say ‘which P are you?’ and then on a flip chart write: ‘Participant’, ‘Passenger’ and ‘Prisoner’. As you write give no more than a very brief explanation (people will always engage with this question) eg ‘engaged in and committed to the process’, ‘along for the ride’, ‘bludgeoned into taking part’

- It’s very important to describe the 3 Ps in the following order: Participant, Passenger, Prisoner
  The prison position must be seen as the outsider to a mainstream process; and a choice that is ‘owned’ by those who make it - it’s somehow easier to choose an outside position when it is offered last

- Make a note of each person’s name against each heading and (in this case as it’s part of a longer session) leave to one side to return to later.

- At the end of the session and after you’ve covered the planned agenda ask participants if they’ve moved their perception (in either direction)

- Explore the results further with the group if necessary – if they’ve moved, why?
  What could influence their position in the future? Are there any issues that have emerged from this exercise that need addressing? Are there any actions they want to agree to ensure full participation? This is especially relevant for those who may join the partnership later on behalf of their organisations, but who weren’t involved at the beginning and may not understand its purpose

- Note that this exercise is about issues of choice, commitment and leadership – in reality no-one is a prisoner and partners can leave if they wish to if the benefits are not sufficient in relation to the investment.

Further work may need to be done to either convince those present or to make a case for continued involvement (or not) to others. It’s also very important to note that those taking part are likely to have a strong leadership role within their own organisation. Whether they’re leaders by their position (CEO, trustee etc) or by influence (as representative of the partnership within their organisation and vice-versa) this matters. ‘Prisoners’ and to a lesser extent ‘passengers’ can have a significant negative impact and the support worker must help the collaboration to address this issue before progress can be made.