

Faith matters

Case studies from the
Faiths in Action Fund

By Irene Evison



Faith matters

Faiths in action series

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Foreword

Faith will always matter to our society. However, in the past too much of the discussion of faith has focused on our differences. Today, the role of faith in our communities allows us to enter into dialogue based on the values we share: tolerance, diversity, community. With these in mind, any discussion of our differences is both productive and supportive.

This book presents the successes and challenges of projects funded by the Faiths in Action grant programme. Launched in 2008, Faiths in Action began funding local inter faith activities across the country. The success of these projects lies in their ability to reach out to so many sectors of society. Faith can reach even those hidden communities that are all too often excluded from community life.

As so many case studies in this book point out, personal relationships are at the heart of inter faith work. The organisations, whether faith-based or otherwise, do not limit themselves to a single identity, but include people who are secular, people of different faiths and of different ethnicities. In a number of projects, it was not a single faith that brought participants together in the beginning, but instead a shared passion that let people of different faiths explore what they have in common. This is the essence of the cohesion agenda – local people from different backgrounds working together toward common goals.

Faith and inter faith work is driven by a strong and lasting commitment to making a difference in our communities. For so many local people, faith work brings out enthusiasm and dedication in a way other forms of involvement do not. Such a

sustainable commitment from the ground needs to be matched with sustainable funding from government and others. To ignore the importance of faith work would be to do our communities and ourselves a great disservice.

I am deeply grateful to the many organisations and communities who have contributed great time and great insight to this book. It is my hope that policymakers will carry forward the learning from the Faiths in Action programme, taking us one step further toward realising the vision of a more inclusive society.



Alison Seabrooke
Chief Executive
Community Development Foundation

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Community Development Foundation (CDF)

CDF is a non-departmental public body sponsored by Communities and Local Government (CLG) and a charity registered in England and Wales and recognised in Scotland. CDF's mission is to lead community development analysis and strategy in order to empower people to influence decisions that affect their lives.

CDF is the leading source of intelligence, guidance and delivery on community development, engagement, empowerment and capacity building in England and across the UK.

Our work cuts across government departments, regional and local public agencies and the community and voluntary sectors. We also operate at European and international level.

CDF's key aim is to build engaged, cohesive and stronger communities and community sector by:

- advising government and other bodies on community involvement, civil renewal and community cohesion, and measures to build strong, active communities and promote community development
- supporting community work of all kinds through networks, links with practitioners, collaborative work with partner organisations, funding and management of local projects
- carrying out research, evaluation and policy analysis to identify good practice in all aspects of community development and involvement, and disseminating lessons through training, conferences, publications and consultancy.

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Chapter One

Introduction

Context

In the 2001 census, over 44 million people in the UK identified themselves as having a religious faith (ONS, 2004). Along with diversity of people and beliefs, comes a diversity of roles faith plays in daily life. For some, their faith offers a moral grounding, for others it can be a source of tension, and for so many, faith is a gateway into community life.

As the population of England grows ever more diverse, government has taken steps towards building stronger relationships with all sectors of our society. This includes reaching out to engage more effectively with the faith sector. A new collection of government policies share a common message: our future depends on our ability to recognise and respect both our similarities and differences.

In 2005, Communities and Local Government (CLG) launched the Faith Communities Capacity Building Fund (FCCBF), a grant programme run by the Community Development Foundation (CDF). It was the first time central government had 'directly and uniquely funded the faith sector through a grants scheme' (James, 2007, p. 55). The final evaluation of FCCBF found that faith offered an opportunity to bring people together in constructive dialogue and interaction. Three years later in 2008, CLG launched *Face to Face and Side by Side: A framework for partnership in our multi faith society*. This included a second grant programme for inter faith projects: Faiths in Action.

After the end of its first year, Faiths in Action has brought to light the depth and breadth of inter faith work and faith-based social action taking place across the country. Programmes like Faiths in Action provide opportunities for all of us to better understand

what we have in common, while celebrating the diversity that makes the UK a unique place to live.

Face to Face and Side by Side: A framework for partnership in our multi faith society

When the Commission on Integration and Cohesion declared in 2007 that there was a need for ‘more constructive conversation between those who are religious and those who are not’ (Commission on Integration and Cohesion, 2007, p. 86), CLG responded with *Face to Face and Side by Side: A framework for partnership in our multi faith society* (CLG, 2008, p. 8). Informed by a three-month public consultation, the framework ‘aims to create more local opportunities both for face to face dialogue which supports a greater understanding of shared values as well as an appreciation of distinctiveness; and for side by side collaborative social action where people come together and share their time, energy and skills to improve their local neighbourhood’ (CLG, 2008, p. 8). It is based on three core principles: partnership, empowerment, and choice. The framework aims to increase opportunities for dialogue and social action by focusing on four building blocks:

- developing the confidence and skills to ‘bridge’ and ‘link’
- supporting shared spaces for interaction and social action
- developing structures and processes which support dialogue and social action
- improving opportunities for learning which build understanding.

The government has already taken practical steps towards making the *Face to Face and Side by Side* framework a reality. At the regional level, CLG is funding regional faith forums to provide support to local inter faith and faith groups and give faith communities a voice on regional issues. The £4m grant funding programme of Faiths in Action brings the framework to a more local level, by funding local activities and initiatives that have a direct link to one of the four building blocks.

About Faiths in Action

The Faiths in Action grant funding programme is funded by CLG and managed by CDF. In Round 1 of funding, more than £2 million in grants were distributed. Out of 588 applicants, 216 groups were selected for funding. The grants ranged from £1,500 to £12,000, and projects will run between 2009 and 2011. Round 2 opened in November 2009 and was still accepting applications at the time of writing. The programme is expected to run until March 2011, subject to Ministerial approval. The programme is open to all types of organisations at national, regional or local level in England, and funds faith and inter faith work at a local level.

Faiths in Action funding has opened a world of opportunity for organisations to engage community members in ‘face to face’ dialogue and ‘side by side’ collaborative social action. Through their participation in the funded projects, community members are gaining a greater understanding of their shared values, as well as an appreciation of their distinctiveness. Local people are coming together to share their time, energy and skills to improve their neighbourhoods and the quality of their lives.

Project managers from 19 of the funded organisations were interviewed for this book. Faiths in Action funding has given each of the organisations the vital support they need to deliver their projects, while providing them with the flexibility they need to do such complex work.

A community development approach to grant giving

One of the greatest barriers to improving the relationship between faith groups and government is the way in which funding is often provided. The FCCBF research found that several issues prevented faith groups from making the most of government funding. Among the concerns raised by faith workers was the feeling that government funds were made available based on untested assumptions of local needs, that funding schemes did not fit with the values of the faith sector, and that faith groups often lacked the experience and skills to write bids and identify funding opportunities (James, 2007, pp. 59–61).

CDF aims to break down such barriers by placing the values of community development at the core of all its grant programmes.

In practice, this means allowing communities themselves to identify their own needs and priorities, employing fair policies and practices that respect a diversity of groups, and supporting groups throughout the course of their work (Evison with Roe, 2009, pp. 2–3). Faiths in Action funding has allowed groups to continue, and in most cases enhance, the distinctive contribution of faith and inter faith work to communities. By increasing dialogue and interaction between people of different faiths, participants are taking the first steps toward building more cohesive communities. In many cases, projects' reach can even extend to hidden and socially excluded groups. The projects funded as part of Faiths in Action are bringing people together from all walks of life to tackle misconceptions and encourage collaboration between different faith communities.

Content of this book

The case studies in this book offer a window into the successes, challenges and impact of inter faith work across the country. They are just a sample of the wide variety of initiatives that have been and will be funded by Faiths in Action over the course of the programme. While faith work covers many areas, the case studies in this book focus on four key themes: dialogue, social action, the environment, and young people. In every case, local people are taking the first steps toward building more cohesive, active and tolerant communities. Whether you are a policymaker working on faith issues or a community worker engaging with local faith communities, the learning from this book serves as a resource and a point of reference for your future work.

This book is divided into seven Chapters:

- Introduction: the background and context of the *Face to Face and Side by Side* framework and the Faiths in Action programme.
- Summary of learning and reflection: the key messages and lessons from across the case studies.
- Four chapters of case studies: 19 examples of projects funded by Faiths in Action.
- Conclusion: a reflection on what has been achieved through the Faiths in Action programme.

Each case study begins with a description of the project and its aims. It then describes the outcomes of the project's work to date, identifying the difference the work has made to inter faith activity and relationships, and to the four 'building blocks' of the *Face to Face and Side by Side* framework. Each case study concludes by explaining any barriers the project faced and how they were overcome, and reflects on the ingredients for success and future sustainability.

In this book we apply the term 'faith' to embrace a wide range of 'faith, religious and belief' groups. We use the term 'faith' because this is the term Faiths in Action has used from the outset. We recognise that 'belief groups' make an important contribution to equality and cohesion work around 'religion and belief' in the UK. It is important to note that existing international standards, including the *Human Rights Act 1998*, do not speak of religion in an isolated sense, but of religion or belief. According to the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE, 2004, s. A, para. 3), the 'belief aspect typically pertains to deeply held conscientious beliefs that are fundamental about the human condition and the world'. Our use of the term 'faith' in this publication is intended as a portmanteau term to cover 'faith, religion and belief' and follows from the OSCE definition.

Chapter Two

Reflections and learning

The Faiths in Action programme is only part of the way through, but already it is possible to reflect on what has been achieved so far and to learn from how different organisations have approached their inter faith work.

There is a tremendous richness to the work described in this book; this chapter draws out some common themes and emerging lessons.

Faith and inter faith working

Making it possible to carry out inter faith work

It is absolutely clear that without the grants received from Faiths in Action, most organisations would not have delivered the project they were funded to do. The organisations did not have access to alternative sources of funding, and the intended activities could only be implemented if there was money available to pay, for example, wages, venues, and materials. The input from volunteers has been considerable and highly valued, but a number of interviewees commented that there are some things that volunteers cannot cover. The role of a project manager can be done by a volunteer, but several people's experience was that it can be very time consuming and as a volunteer, they could not fulfil the role satisfactorily. They noted that if this is a paid role, the person can afford to devote the amount of time needed and be available at the times when they are really needed.

Organisations do not have to be faith based to do inter faith work or to benefit from it

It is noticeable that several of the organisations described in this book are not faith-based organisations. They may be youth organisations or arts organisations, such as Burnley Youth Theatre. However, all organisations recognise the importance of

the faith dimension: they want to engage with it in their community and see a real benefit in doing so.

From their perspective, they have been able to open up their services to a wider audience, which has built new community relationships for them – with individuals and organisations – and this increases their impact. Thinking about and incorporating a faith perspective has helped them take their work in new directions. Cambridge Carbon Footprint, for example, took an existing model and added a faith dimension, which is something quite new for them.

Projects may have a focal point other than faith, for example play for St John's Wood Adventure Playground, and sport for the Leeds Jewish Representative Council. However, the work has combined a faith element within the overall project in such a way that leads to inter faith outcomes.

Work by faith-based organisations brings benefits to a wider community

All of the projects organised by faith-based organisations are intended to reach out to an audience much wider than their own members, and often including people not following a particular faith or with no faith at all. Project managers commented that the richness of debate was enhanced by including people with all sorts of views. For example, the Multi-Faith Centre in Derby found having people with no faith as well as people with several different faith backgrounds take part added value. Several of the activities organised through the project work were intended to offer something to local community audiences, such as the concerts held by Sacred Space and Sound It Out, or the community events held by Broxtowe Community Celebration. People from the wider community who get involved in these sorts of activities may benefit just by having fun, but they may also learn something, for example about their neighbourhood's diversity.

Inter faith working begins at a personal level

Many of the interviewees spoke of how essential personal relationships were for creating inter faith understanding. The starting point is conversations between individuals, leading

to a whole variety of important things such as trust, understanding of ritual and belief, respect and friendship.

Several project leaders made the point that the individuals involved in these projects were passing on their learning and new ways of thinking to other people in their community, in particular friends and family. There is something of a 'trickle-down' effect based on personal relationships.

Building relationships at an organisational level

Relationships at an organisational level are also important for building inter faith relations in an area. Again, these are based on linkages and communication between individuals. It was the personal connection between project workers at the Basement Project and Burnley Youth Theatre that led to their organisations working together on the Faiths in Action-funded project.

It goes further than individual relationships though: it is useful to develop an institutional connection. This can be with other faith-based organisations, such as has begun to happen between St Michael's Parochial Church Council and other local places of worship. It can also be between faith-based and non-faith organisations, such as Cambridge Carbon Footprint, which has built up its networks among local faith-based organisations through its current Faiths in Action project. There can also be relationships which grow between community-level organisations and public sector bodies, such as through the Churches' Council for Industry and Social Responsibility (ISR) major emergency planning project.

Faith and culture

It is not always easy to separate faith and culture, and projects have found that it may not be helpful to do so. The sorts of inter faith work that many of the projects showcased here are doing often takes advantage of cultural dimensions, such as trying out particular creative arts associated with a culture rather than a faith.

Recognising what people of different faith backgrounds have in common

The process that these projects have supported, where people of different faiths have come together and begun to learn about each

other's faith practices and beliefs, has enabled many participants to realise for the first time that actually there is common ground: similar values, similar interests. As well as having become more aware about differences, they now appreciate what they have in common.

Being open about inter faith working

The close match with what the organisations wanted to achieve and the overall purpose of the Faiths in Action programme was very much welcomed. In particular, it was so important that faith could be 'out in the open', both in terms of an organisation seeking funding and how they worked. In many cases, a crucial part of the project was providing an opportunity for people to talk about faith that they probably would not otherwise have had, and a way of doing so that enabled them to tackle sensitive topics.

Faith and social action

A number of the projects were explicit in their aims to make a concrete difference in the wider community, as well as building inter faith relationships. As a result of the Faiths in Action-funded work, there will be some lasting physical benefits to neighbourhoods, such as community gardens or works of art. There will also be a legacy in terms of the way that individuals are now equipped to take activities forwards, such as the young people trained by the Multi-Faith Centre in Derby or the Bolton Lads and Girls Club who now want to be volunteers for those groups' wider activities.

Ingredients for success

Approaches that encourage interaction at an individual level

Elsewhere, the point is made about how important individual relationships are to the development of inter faith working. Often, participants have few opportunities to meet people from different faiths. Many of the projects described in this book specifically planned to offer opportunities for people to meet other people of different faith backgrounds on a one-to-one basis, to talk and get to know one another. For example, the Redbridge Faith Forum's women's inter faith evenings give women the chance to

meet informally, in a safe environment with a facilitator who helps women overcome any worries about how to talk to women from other faith backgrounds and who guides discussion so that it is comfortable and enjoyable for everyone.

Building on an existing model

If the project is developing an approach that has already been used (either extending existing work to a new audience, or adapting an existing model to be used in a new way), it is faster to get the project up and running and there are likely to be fewer problems in delivering it. Cambridge Carbon Footprint, for example, already delivered courses to help people think about carbon dioxide emissions; the Faiths in Action funding enabled them to take this work further through adapting the material to target people from faith backgrounds. The project manager noted that they were able to achieve far more than if they had been starting from scratch.

A common interest at the heart of the project

It has worked well for several projects to have a theme at the heart of the project which is a common interest to people, regardless of their faith background. For example, all the participants in the Sound It Out project shared a passion for music and choral singing. This meant that they had something they could talk about together right from the start, and the subject continued to act as a catalyst for conversation throughout the project, prompting conversations directly related to faith as well as broader discussions.

Having fun!

Whilst all projects have a serious purpose and the people running the projects are serious about inter faith working, several project managers said how important it is to have fun. People are able to relax, to enjoy one another's company and therefore open up to one another. It is also important that participants stay motivated. The Multi-Faith Centre in Derby, for example, took the young people to Blackpool Pleasure Beach before they visited a local place of worship; the Leeds Jewish Representative Council centred their project for young people around cricket, which was something the young people really enjoyed.

Practicalities

Getting the timings and venues right

Enabling people to take part in inter faith work has a lot to do with getting the basics right, in particular finding a time and a place that works for everyone.

Project workers have thought about when different faith festivals fall during the year, to ensure that events that they planned did not clash with them. If a project group met on a weekly basis, workers thought about which days and times of day were likely to work best; it seems that Sunday afternoons tended to be suitable.

Several projects identified the importance of a venue that participants see as neutral, particularly when the group is first starting. Often, this means finding a place which is not associated with any particular faith, such as a community centre or a library. Later on in a project, when people are feeling more comfortable in a group and trust towards people of different faiths is beginning to grow, visits to places associated with a particular faith group have worked very well. The Redbridge Faith Forum, for example, began their meetings in one woman's house, and then at later meetings visited several local places of worship.

Hospitality

It was significant to be able to offer hospitality as part of the projects, in particular sharing food and drink. The funding from Faiths in Action was often vital for this. Several project managers talked about how offering and enjoying foods representative of different faiths and cultures had been an important part of their projects. The volunteers for Broxtowe Community Celebration got to know one another far better than before because they made time to have shared lunches, and a key part of their summer community event was offering foods from many different faiths to all of the people who came.

Sufficient time for planning

The projects have all achieved a huge amount so far, which can be attributed in part to the amount and quality of planning by staff and volunteers. However, this takes time and some project managers commented that they had under-estimated what was

required. Invariably, they had overcome this by doing longer hours than the budget allowed for. They noted that when planning projects in future, they will be able to be more realistic about the level of management time that is needed.

Evaluation and moving forwards

Most of the organisations whose projects are described in this book are hoping to continue the project or to develop it in some way, based on what has happened during the Faiths in Action funded project. The process of producing a case study has created a unique opportunity for project managers to reflect on their work, but this is only part of the story. Different projects are taking different approaches to evaluating what they have achieved and the process they adopted. Across Communities' young people's management group is feeding its views into the main project steering group. West Berkshire Minority Ethnic Forum's mentoring project has asked mentors and mentees to fill in feedback sheets after each meeting and these are reviewed every six months by the project manager and other key individuals. The Leeds Jewish Representative Council is exploring the possibility of teaming up with Leeds Metropolitan University and a local filmmaker to carry out an evaluation. The girls attending the Just4Girls sessions at the Bolton Lads and Girls Club were asked to say what they think worked well and what activities they would like to have. The important thing is that the organisations are thinking about how they can best work in future, building on the learning from their recent experiences.

Sustainability

Several of the projects are ongoing pieces of work, or have set up groups of people who would like to continue meeting. The key question is of course, how can this be done after the Faiths in Action funding ends? The projects are preparing in a variety of ways. St Michael's Parochial Church Council's steering group for the community garden has received pledges from volunteers to continue to give their time for garden maintenance. Conflict and Change will use its own organisational resources to provide staff support for the project's trainees through an informal quarterly networking meeting at a local community café. The women will be able to pick up hints and tips from staff and their fellow trainees, so that they can carry on running inter faith events on their own.

Several projects are hoping to be able to win further grant funding, using the learning from their Faiths in Action project to inform their applications.

Community development approaches from the grant fund

Community development-based approaches to grant funding are characterised by the design and delivery of the grant programme including some or all of the following:^{*}

- Addressing the needs of communities as expressed by those communities.
- Enabling the funded organisations to deliver their work using community development approaches.
- Focusing on outcomes, not activities and outputs.
- Being supportive, at all stages of the programme.
- Building a relationship with the funded organisations.

There are many different ways that the Faiths in Action programme and the projects it has funded have exemplified this approach.

All of the projects are very clear about the way in which they are responding to a need that they have identified. Often, a previous piece of work has shown up some problem or a gap in current services, which the organisation has then responded to by planning a new project. For example, Conflict and Change found that their core work in building community relationships and trust in Newham was not doing enough to support inter faith working, and that in the instances when it did, the techniques were not as effective as they could be and they were not reaching out enough to women. In other cases, the impetus was not one of improving what was already being done, but starting something completely new to meet a newly emerging need. The West Berkshire Minority Ethnic Forum's mentoring project is a good example of this, where

* For more information on this, see *Funding Communities, Adding Value: Community development approaches to grant giving* (Evison with Roe, 2009)

there was an increasing need to build bridges between the local Muslim community and the police.

The use of community development tools and techniques has been core to the way that the projects have worked with participants. The underlying ethos has been about being inclusive, giving people a voice, giving people the skills and confidence to take part and to be active in their community, and reflecting together on what is being achieved. For example, the main purpose of the Bolton Lads and Girls Club Just4Girls project was to make the club fully inclusive, as there were many girls locally who had not been able to take advantage of the club because they could not attend when there were lads there. Once at the club, the girls were actively involved in saying what activities they would like to do, and project staff were careful to deliver these activities in ways that the girls would respond to, such as using craft activities, rather than formal discussion groups, to stimulate discussions about faith.

A focus on outcomes has been key. All of the projects have been very clear about what it is that they are trying to achieve: more understanding about one another's faiths, increasing trust and respect towards people of other faiths, breaking down barriers between faiths and building relationships, overcoming misconceptions and stereotypes. The Faiths in Action programme's overall purpose is a very close fit with the organisations' goals; many interviewees made this point, emphasising that this was refreshing and probably unique for them.

The Faiths in Action programme has offered more to the funded projects than the grant itself. Several of the project managers noted that there has always been a member of staff to speak to when they needed to, and that staff are responsive, encouraging and flexible. In particular, this has been important when a project hit a snag and needed to reconsider its approach. The Weymouth Peace Garden, for example, were able to reallocate part of their budget after they found they no longer needed some of the spend they had anticipated in the budget in their original project proposal. The Energesis Trust were able to change the location of the schools they planned to work with, on the basis of the steering group's learning from the project's first year of delivery.

The Face to Face and Side by Side building blocks

Face to Face and Side by Side (CLG, 2008) is the Government's framework document which sets out how it intends to support stronger dialogue between people of different faiths and beliefs, and encourage practical inter faith co-operation. The framework is structured around four 'building blocks':

- A Developing the confidence and skills to 'bridge' and 'link'.
- B Shared spaces for interaction and social action.
- C Structures and processes which support dialogue and social action.
- D Opportunities for learning which build understanding.

As part of the process of drawing up these case studies, each project manager was asked to reflect on how their project had contributed to any or all of these 'building blocks'. Without exception, each person could comment very directly about the ways in which their project had made a difference to individuals and more broadly. Also, it was striking to see how well the outcomes they identified related to these 'building blocks'; indeed, several noted how close a fit there was between the 'building blocks' and the goal of their work. Many commented that the distinction between the 'blocks' is sometimes blurred, in particular the last two (C and D). This seems to be because so often it is the dialogue which is in itself the opportunity for learning.

Developing the confidence and skills to 'bridge' and 'link'

Time and time again, project managers commented that the individuals taking part in the project had grown enormously in confidence in relation to feeling able to talk to people of different faith backgrounds.

In many cases, the project's work gave the participants particular skills which helped them talk to people from different backgrounds, particularly for young people, for example, communication skills, facilitation skills, and presentation skills. Some projects approached skills development in a structured way, with a tailored training course, such as the Multi-Faith Centre in

Derby. Others built skills in a much more informal way, for example Burnley Youth Theatre.

But there was more to it than skills development. It was also about self confidence to approach someone different to yourself and to bridge the perceived gap between 'you' and 'them'. The projects often have been the first opportunity for the participants to meet someone from another faith. The activities have given them a route to making contact, to talk to one another and importantly, to ask and answer questions.

Personal relationships are the 'bridge' and the 'link'. These projects give numerous examples of how individuals have begun to forge relationships with others in their neighbourhood, town or city that they would not otherwise have done. Project managers seem confident that with time, some of these will grow into enduring, self-sustaining friendships. There are also now new connections at an organisational level between grassroots communities and statutory bodies, such as the formal and informal working demonstrated by the West Berkshire Minority Ethnic Forum's mentoring project, and the new relationships created through the Broxtowe Community Celebration Group for faith communities and the Local Strategic Partnership.

Shared spaces for interaction and social action

Project managers talked about physical and emotional spaces for interacting.

Some projects focused on creating an actual place for interaction, a physical space. The two clearest examples of this are St Michael's Parochial Church Council and the Society of Friends in Dorchester and Weymouth, both of which have used Faiths in Action funding to create community gardens.

The other sort of space is emotional space, and many project managers talked about how their project had created a safe space for people to meet and talk. It is well recognised that faith can be a very sensitive discussion topic (for various reasons) and so people can feel reticent about revealing their opinions or beliefs. Importantly, many of the projects described in this book aim to give people of different backgrounds a place where the atmosphere

was conducive to talking openly together. Often this involved choosing a space perceived by participants as neutral and not associated with any particular faith: for example, the Sound It Out project deliberately chose to hold their concert in Birmingham Old Library for this reason. Also, a common theme was creating somewhere where people could overcome any fears of talking about faith, such as the facilitated events of the Redbridge Faith Forum or the art workshops of Burnley Youth Theatre.

Structures and processes which support dialogue and social action

Dialogue has underlain all of the inter faith work in these projects. There is an unshakeable belief that if individuals can talk to one another and listen to what the other person has to say, enhanced mutual understanding and stronger relationships will be the eventual outcome. For many of the projects, dialogue went hand-in-hand with people coming together to do something constructive to benefit their local community.

Projects took different approaches to dialogue. In some cases, the project was specifically structured to provide opportunities for dialogue. The West Berkshire Minority Ethnic Forum's mentoring project brought members of the Muslim community and police officers together on a one-to-one basis to talk to each other. Oxygen's Sacred Space project provided facilitated art and craft sessions for young people which included planned discussion time on a chosen theme. Other projects created space for more informal dialogue on the back of another activity. Broxtowe Community Celebration events included a plethora of activities for local people specially designed to give time for and encourage informal conversation, such as while a henna design was being painted on a hand.

There are several examples of how projects have encouraged individuals and groups into taking action in their community and further afield. Some of the projects had a specific aim to take action, such as St Michael's Parochial Church Council and the Society of Friends Dorchester and Weymouth projects to create community gardens, and the two projects encouraging people to reduce their environmental impact – The Energesis Trust and Cambridge Carbon Footprint. For other projects, participants went

on to take action as a result of what they had learnt from the project. For example, after their involvement in the Broxtowe Community Celebration project, one young person joined the local Youth Parliament and some adults joined their local LINK (Local Involvement Network for health and social care). This social action has happened for several reasons: people have become energised; they have become aware of an issue and want to do something about it; individuals have gained the confidence to take action, perhaps because they have been equipped with the right skills, perhaps because they feel that they have the support from others to do so.

Opportunities for learning which build understanding

Again, this ‘building block’ is absolutely fundamental to faith and inter faith work. Commonly, the projects funded by Faiths in Action have all provided opportunities for people to learn and thereby understand more about other people, and in particular, their faith backgrounds. The project managers spoke of so many different people who had benefited from learning through their involvement in a project. Typically, a key thing was finding out about the basic tenets of belief of other faiths, as well as understanding habits and behaviours.

How people learn needs to be kept in mind. Several project managers stressed how they had tried to respond to the different ways in which people learn. Experiential learning was very successful, where participants were able to share their own experiences with others. This worked because it did not ask too much of people and everyone respected one another for their own experience. For young people, hands-on and informal learning methods were important.

The focus of many of the projects was to provide opportunities for people of one faith to learn more about other faiths. However, there were also opportunities for people with a spirituality but no particular faith, or people of no faith, who were welcomed into events, activities and discussions.

Working with women

Three of the projects are specifically aimed at women – the Redbridge Faith Forum’s women’s inter faith discussion evenings,

Conflict and Change's women's training programme for inter faith facilitation, and the Bolton Lads and Girls Club's Just4Girls youth club provision. The organisations created the kind of atmosphere where women would feel comfortable to take part in inter faith discussions and to undertake training and learning; and provided a space that women and girls would be able to come to. Other projects have taken women's needs into consideration, so that the activities could be inclusive. Sound It Out carefully planned how the different choirs would work together and what sort of music would be suitable.

Working with young people

Several of the projects described here are targeted at young people – Across Communities, Smethwick Youth and Community Centre, Sacred Space, St John's Wood Adventure Playground, Burnley Youth Theatre, Leeds Jewish Representative Council, and The Energesis Trust. These projects' ways of working have been chosen to appeal to young people and to tackle the kinds of issues that are important to them, such as climate change. The projects have engaged a range of different age groups, from young children to students at university. There is an underlying belief that the learning that children and young people absorb will endure as they grow up, and that what they learn through the projects will be taken out into their everyday lives and so have an impact throughout the local area.

Partnership working

Partnership working has been a core part of these projects, in particular as groups have come together to deliver specific activities. To name just a few: West Berkshire Minority Ethnic Forum has created a new way of partnership working between the Muslim community and police; St Michael's Parochial Church Council has developed a completely new partnership with a local social enterprise; Burnley Youth Theatre have delivered their project together with a local Christian organisation working with young people not in employment, education or training; Churches' Council for Industry and Social Responsibility (ISR) have worked with their regional faith forum (FaithNet SouthWest) to build up contacts for their chaplaincy project. The funding from Faiths in Action has enabled these partnerships to be tested out, so that some very exciting and innovative things have been achieved in

communities. Also, with the experience of joint working behind them, several of these partnerships are now well positioned for the future, providing structures to enable joint working for inter faith and wider community benefit in the coming years.

Policy messages from the projects

We asked all the interviewees to think about their messages for policy makers concerning the sort of work they were doing. The following main themes came through very strongly:

The power of inter faith working at a very local level should be recognised and supported

Successful inter faith working is founded upon building personal relationships; the projects which do this best operate at a local level. Together, a large number of very local projects can have a significant impact, each one making a difference in its own neighbourhood or locality, through local people. The value of this sort of approach should be recognised, in tandem with regional or national initiatives, such as Faith Forums.

As one interviewee said, 'If you touch a handful of people, that's important.'

Inter faith work can contribute to community cohesion

Inter faith working helps individuals from different faith and cultural backgrounds get to know one another better and build a deeper understanding. This can contribute to other local and regional agendas, including community cohesion. Inter faith work should be valued on its own merit, as well as for its ability to support the cohesion agenda.

Inter faith working cannot reach its full potential without funding and other support

The interviewees were unanimous in saying that their projects would not have gone ahead without the Faiths in Action funding, despite the immense input from volunteers. All charities are feeling the pinch of the current economic climate which is putting pressure on both public sector funding and grant-making from independent trusts and foundations. Grant funding opportunities for faith-based organisations in particular are also limited because

of funders' often unfounded concern regarding promoting proselytism. Therefore, the funding from Faiths in Action – or a similar grant programme – is seen as essential if inter faith work is to be continued.

As with any grant, organisations value project funding over several years, so they have time to plan and develop the work. Several interviewees made the point that successful inter faith work depends on developing relationships based on trust and respect, and that this takes time. Several of the organisations were making contact with people and organisations they had not previously engaged with; it can be time-consuming to make the initial contact with the 'right' person, as well as then beginning to get them involved and to establish a relationship. The funding for staff positions has also been invaluable, often providing co-ordination, planning and delivery capacity that would not otherwise have been supported.

However, it is not just funding that is important. Projects also value other types of support, in particular opportunities for networking. Project managers noted the benefit they had got from meeting other organisations, particularly if they were not a faith-based organisation. They mentioned the benefit of extending their organisational relationships with faith-based organisations, or meeting people from other organisations further afield doing similar work and exchanging experiences.

Some thinking about the policy messages from the projects

With a 'bird's eye view' over the 19 projects presented in this book, as well as the project managers' own messages for policy makers, it is possible to add a few more thoughts.

- These projects are striking in succeeding in equipping individuals and small groups with the skills and confidence to do inter faith work in their own local areas, and to take action. The funding from Faiths in Action has been instrumental in enabling these people to put their ideas into action, ideas that have grown from real local knowledge about real local needs. There are some projects that are new and imaginative, others that put tried and tested methodologies into practice, but what

they have in common is addressing a need and offering a solution.

- These projects have shown clearly that one of the most important factors which contributes to successful inter faith working is working at a personal level, bringing individuals and small groups together, at a very local level. This has implications for the design of any programme to support this sort of work in future. The community development approach to grant funding is a very good fit with the way small, local community and faith groups work. Whilst it may cost more to deliver, it brings results in terms of enabling grassroots community activity to bear fruit.
- Another important element of successful inter faith working is having sufficient time for the projects to become established and start to have an impact. A significant reason for this is that it takes time to build effective, constructive personal and organisational relationships. In year one of funded work, groups and individuals are beginning to get to know one another and have probably started to try to work together; in the second year, things are beginning to bed down and people are working together more harmoniously and effectively, but is there a third year of funding support when the project is really taking off? Many of the organisations running the projects presented in this book are planning on continuing their work after the Faiths in Action funding comes to an end. It has been immensely beneficial to them to have up to two years' funding. Now they can see the difference that their work is making and they are confident that they have found an effective way of working. However, if they are to continue, most of them still see a need for some degree of external funding, even though they have some mechanisms in place for sustaining the work.
- There is an issue for faith-based organisations in terms of how their work is perceived by potential funders. The fact that their work is inspired by faith does not mean that they are trying to promote a particular faith. This distinction needs to be recognised, and the value of faith-motivated work in and across communities recognised.
- The volunteers, workers, steering groups and project managers all see a value in doing inter faith work, for its own sake. Inter faith work is something they recognise a continued need for, regardless of whether there is a government-sponsored grant

fund or a government agenda that is promoting it. Government support has been vital to allow them to run projects that reach out to other faith communities, and as shown above, there is a strong demand for it to continue. Some of the project managers spoke of a link between their project's inter faith work and other government agendas. However, the real focus of their work remains on building relationships between people of different faiths, and helping people to understand one another.



Chapter Three

Faith and the environment

Introduction

In this theme, the following case studies are presented:

St Michael's Parochial Church Council

How a church group has begun to work together with local individuals and faith groups and a nearby social enterprise, to create a community sensory garden (page 26).

The Energesis Trust

Bringing children and young people of different faiths together through learning about climate change (page 32).

Dorchester and Weymouth Preparative Meeting Religious Society of Friends (Quakers)

Creating a community peace garden by volunteers from different faiths and none, and the beginnings of a grassroots-level inter faith network (page 37).

Cambridge Carbon Footprint

Bringing people together from different faith backgrounds to think about how to reduce their carbon dioxide emissions (page 43).

A few key messages

- The dimension of faith can be used to tackle environmental problems. The state of the environment – locally and globally – and people’s impact on the environment are concerns for people of all backgrounds. The faith dimension brings added benefit through incorporating the values and traditions of different faiths to environmental work.
- A desire to take environmental action can be a unifying interest. Different groups and individuals can come together around this common theme. Through working and talking together, people have been able to make connections with people of different faiths in a way that is meaningful to them because it is based on a shared interest. Environmental concerns also act as catalysts to discussion about faith, for example, what different faiths have to say about living simply and valuing the earth.
- The process of taking action to make environmental improvements is as valuable as the result. This is particularly so for the benefits it has brought in terms of building relationships between individuals and groups of different faiths. This is not to downplay the direct environmental improvements the projects have made, such as reductions in carbon dioxide emissions and creation of high quality local green space.
- The environment is a topic that is relevant to people of all ages. The projects described here have brought different generations together, as well as children and young people who would not usually have the chance to learn from one another in this way.

Organisation

St Michael's Parochial Church Council

Project name

St Michael's Community Garden

Project purpose

The project's primary aim was to create a community garden in an area behind the church, in place of a derelict and dangerous former church hall building. It was to be a sensory garden with 'tactile, smelly plants' and plants from around the world to represent the diversity of cultures in the neighbourhood (Handsworth, Birmingham).

However, the Parochial Church Council (PCC) soon realised that the process of creating the garden was as valuable as the garden itself, bringing individuals and faith groups from the local area together to contribute to the project. The PCC is also working with a partner organisation, the Jericho Foundation, to involve long-term unemployed people in creating the garden as a skills training project.

Project activities

The project has one year's funding from Faiths in Action. The project actually began in the summer of 2007 when the PCC began to think about what to do with the derelict hall building. They ran an initial informal consultation in the local area which suggested there was good support for a garden.

The PCC members felt they did not have the skills or capacity to plan and create a garden on their own, so they looked for a partner to help them. Groundwork Birmingham, an environmental charity located nearby, was interested and got involved. Groundwork led the project in carrying out a comprehensive community consultation to find out what people wanted from a community garden, how they wanted it used and what memories they had about the hall which might be incorporated into the garden. The project members circulated the consultation questionnaire

around the church community, to other local faith groups, local schools, local residents and community groups.

The project set up a small working group including members of the PCC, interested individuals from the local area and representatives of other faith groups locally. They worked with a landscape designer to plan the garden, thinking about its design and how to incorporate what people had said they wanted (such as a water feature for tranquillity), and to minimise potential vandalism problems.

Unexpectedly, Groundwork Birmingham declared itself bankrupt, which left the PCC very concerned about the future of the project. However, a suggestion from the Diocese of Birmingham's regeneration officer led to an introduction to the Jericho Foundation. The Foundation runs a social enterprise that works with long-term unemployed people, many of whom are ex-offenders, training them to achieve qualifications and to become ready for work. The vicar and the working group immediately saw the benefits of such a partnership: the process of creating the garden would provide an opportunity for some of the worst-off people in their local community.

The old hall building was demolished in January 2009, and the garden is now under construction. The Jericho Foundation is carrying out the physical works to build the garden. Once the major physical works are done, local people and school children will join in to help with the planting. Weather permitting, the garden will formally open in summer 2010.

Outcomes

Inter faith activity and relationship outcomes

Making relationships stronger

Consulting people helped the PCC to cement its relationships with other faith organisations locally.

Giving local faiths a voice

The process of planning the garden has given local residents and representatives of faith groups a chance to have their say about what they think should be in the garden. This has helped them to

explain different aspects of their faiths to other people, such as the importance of water, or the value of a labyrinth to enable meditation.

Different faiths working together

The workers on the site come from different faith backgrounds. Working together on the garden has given them an opportunity to talk about their faith with one another.

Face to Face and Side by Side *building block outcomes*

Shared spaces for interaction and social action

Once it is finished, the garden will be a local outside space for everyone to share. The PCC hopes that it will become a valued meeting space, as well as a hands-on resource about spirituality for local schools that have a culturally diverse mix of pupils.

Structures and processes that support dialogue and social action

Although unexpected when the PCC originally conceived the project, the process of making the garden happen has brought many people of different backgrounds together. As well as giving them the opportunity to talk about their faith, it has harnessed their energies for the physical project.

The project has given local faith members a way of inter faith working that they can feel a part of.

Opportunities for learning which build understanding

Working together to design the garden has helped people to articulate their faith and spirituality to others.

Other outcomes

- The difficulties that the PCC and working group members have experienced and overcome throughout the project's history have helped them to become more confident.
- Working with the Jericho Foundation has helped people in the PCC and the working group to think about their responsibilities as people of faith towards the less fortunate people in their community.

- The Jericho Foundation has used this first partnership with a faith-based organisation as a stepping stone to building partnerships with other faith groups in Birmingham.

Overcoming barriers

The sudden demise of Groundwork Birmingham was an enormous problem at the time. However, this led to the project seeking alternatives and the new partnership created with the Jericho Foundation is now seen very positively as ‘adding a whole new dimension to the project’.

There were many everyday, practical problems to overcome. For example, the planning process changed part-way through and a new application had to be made which slowed things down. The vicar notes that the best way to deal with this was simply to face up to the situation and just get on with it.

The very bad weather at the end of 2009 and start of 2010 delayed what could be done on site, but everyone is hopeful that with hard work, the planned opening time can still be met.

Key success factors

- The level of local support has been vital, brought about by the consultation process that has really made a difference through people feeling a sense of ownership of the project.
- The partnership with the Jericho Foundation, whose support and commitment to the vision has been invaluable.
- People seizing the chance to be creative and running with the germ of an idea, to take it to where it is now.

With hindsight

Some elements of the work have seemed slow, and might have been faster if the working group had known more. However, the vicar suggests in reality that you have to recognise that you can't expect to have the right information about every eventuality.

How Faiths in Action funding helped make the project more effective

It is important that the Faiths in Action grant fund explicitly recognised the faith dimension, in particular the inclusivity of faith and the abilities of faith groups to work together.

Also, as a Parochial Church Council, opportunities for funding can be limited because of being a faith-based organisation, so it was very welcome that Faiths in Action is available.

When the project funding finishes

The maintenance of the garden was an important part of the design discussions. Its design should make it low maintenance and as vandal-proof as possible and it is hoped that the feeling of local ownership of the project will help with both of these. Some local people have volunteered to contribute to maintenance work in addition to regular 'overhaul' maintenance to be done by Jericho Foundation workers that will be supported by another grant fund.

The garden will be publicised locally to make sure that people know it is open and all can use it. The PCC will maintain its links with local schools to encourage them to use the garden.

'The most significant thing about this project has been ...'

'... working together and seeing the potential for beauty, celebrating diversity and dialogue in an area people would have dismissed as a deeply unpromising place.'

'Through working on this project, the most important thing I've learnt about inter faith working is ...'

'... that personal relationships are really important, and they are key to building trust.'

If you were to give advice to local, regional or national policy makers about the sort of work you've been doing, what would it be?

It's really important to find out what is really needed on the ground and to be flexible about that, as it won't be universal. Listen to what people say, and respond.

Also, recognise that community cohesion and inter faith dialogue are very close to one another. They can happen in all sorts of ways, all of which need supporting.

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Grant value: £12,000 over one year

Staff resource: Contracted staff

Organisation

The Energesis Trust

Project name

The Climate Change Crusaders

Project purpose

The project aims to bring together children and young people of different faiths, using climate change as the vehicle to do so because it can act as a common basis for discussion.

Project activities

This is a two-year project. The first year has been used to develop and pilot the work, and the second year will be focused on delivering a slightly adapted approach.

The basic model involves training a group of sixth form students to deliver seven one-hour sessions about climate change and faith to primary school pupils aged 9–11.

The course is based on materials especially developed during this project by Energesis committee members, teachers and specialists such as graphic designers and publishers brought in to work with the project. There are seven booklets, one for each session. Each booklet is targeted at a different aspect of climate change, using stories especially written and illustrated to convey the messages through superhero characters created for this project. Solartron, for example, is a character transformed from a solar panel and a wind turbine called Tim becomes Turboforce.

As well as reading through the booklets in groups, the sixth formers conduct interactive white board presentations including short videos. The sessions also involve the primary school children in experiments which help to illustrate the topic under discussion. The children listen to the sixth formers as they introduce the topic and how faith can relate to it, and later on, debate with each other about it.

Each primary school pupil is able to take the booklet home and read it with their parents, and do activities at home including simple energy saving tasks. On completing the course, each child receives a certificate and the primary school receives an accreditation showing how much carbon they have saved. Sixth formers are also accredited by Energesis as trained class leaders.

In the pilot year, the project ran in North London, working with one secondary school and three primary schools involving 60 pupils. The pupils were mostly Christians (Roman Catholics) but some were Jews and some were Muslims.

The project required a considerable amount of preparation and training. At the start of the funded project, the materials were at a developmental stage. The project manager worked closely with primary school teachers to develop the activities further, so that they were a good fit with the National Curriculum. A graphic designer was engaged to make the booklets appealing and to give them a professional image.

The sixth formers undertook a series of three after-school training sessions:

1. Familiarisation with the concept of climate change.
2. Familiarisation with the project materials.
3. What they felt about climate change, in terms of their faith and daily lives.

Within each session a lot of time was set aside for group discussion.

In the second year, the organisation will run the project in Chesham. The committee is planning to work with two secondary schools and six primary schools, with more pupils from a wider range of faiths than the pilot phase, including Muslims, Jews, Hindus and Christians.

Outcomes

Inter faith activity and relationship outcomes

Considering the faith perspective

The sessions gave the primary school children and the sixth formers the chance to incorporate the faith perspective into their

discussions about climate change, for example through discussing different faiths' creation stories and what this meant for how people of different faiths thought about the world and its environment.

Discussing difference, finding a common base

The sessions enabled the primary school children to consider the differences between themselves in a constructive way. For the sixth formers, their discussions about climate change became a way in which they could identify similarities between themselves, and therefore look beyond their differences.

Face to Face and Side by Side *building block outcomes*

Structures and processes that support dialogue and social action

The training sessions stimulated discussion between the sixth formers about different faiths' approaches to environmental stewardship, and also what role they could themselves play in their home and school communities.

The faith perspective added a new dimension to discussions about climate change, overcoming a tendency for the sixth formers to see climate change as 'old news'.

Opportunities for learning which build understanding

The sixth formers are now keen to learn more about the links between faith and climate change. These links are not part of the National Curriculum, so this project presented a unique learning opportunity for them.

Other outcomes

- Taking a faith perspective helped the children and young people to build hope for the future, overcoming a sense of hopelessness and disempowerment about climate change.
- Some of the primary school pupils have taken the superhero storylines into the playground, so the project's work has encouraged new and creative play.

Overcoming barriers

During the pilot phase, the project manager and steering group learnt that the project works best when there is a good mix of faiths in the primary school classes they are working with. As this had been a weaker point in the pilot schools, for the second year the project manager has found different schools to work with in a new area where there is more of a mix of faiths.

As a cross-curricular subject, the project's work does not fit directly with primary or secondary school curriculums, and therefore budgets. The project manager found that secondary schools which have a remit for 'extended services' can include this work under that budget line, which makes it possible for sixth formers to take part.

Key success factors

- Using sixth formers to work with the primary school pupils, who saw the older children as 'really cool' and therefore became very enthusiastic.
- The enthusiasm of some of the sixth formers, who worked so well in the primary schools.
- The faith element, which revitalised sixth formers' interest in climate change.
- Using the concept of superheroes, which captured the primary school pupils' imaginations.

With hindsight

The pilot project has highlighted some areas that the project manager and steering group will change for the second year: the schools will have a higher proportion of pupils from minority faith backgrounds; the materials will be slightly revised.

How Faiths in Action funding helped make the project more effective

This project would not have happened without the funding. The project provided the time for the project manager to develop the project fully in partnership with schools, and to make sure that the materials were professional in their appearance.

When the project funding finishes

As part of the project, the steering group is assessing whether the model and the materials have a financial value, so that in future schools would pay for this. One of the trustees is helping to develop a sustainable business plan, responding to feedback that the most likely successful format would be as a complete pack.

‘The most significant thing about this project has been ...’

‘... that it’s met one of the primary objectives of setting up the Energesis Trust – climate change is no longer seen as scary and there is an element of hope rather than hopelessness - hope that has come through exploring it in the context of faith.’

‘Through working on this project, the most important thing I’ve learnt about inter faith working is ...’

‘... that when you find the right project, there’s the will to work together.’

If you were to give one piece of advice to local, regional or national policy makers about the sort of work you’ve been doing, what would it be?

Working together to improve inter faith relationships should be a matter of encouragement and imagination, not something which is forced by rules and regulations – a carrot and not a stick approach.

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Grant value: £11,900 over two years

Staff resource: One part-time staff member, contractors

Organisation

Dorchester and Weymouth Preparative Meeting Religious Society of Friends (Quakers)

Project name

Weymouth Peace Garden

Project purpose

The project aims to create a multi-faith community garden. It will be a symbol of peace which can act as a focus and a shared space for faith groups in Weymouth.

The process of creating the garden is also an important first step to establishing a network of faith groups for the town, starting with the steering group set up for this project.

Project activities

The idea for the garden goes back to January 2008, when a meeting of local Quakers discussed where you could go to celebrate peace (rather than remember war), and also raised concerns about how friends of different faiths had been treated recently. There was also discussion about the local Quaker burial ground which was no longer used. The group members realised that all of these things could be linked by using the burial ground site to create a garden as a local place to celebrate peace, and in so doing, show how different faiths could work together.

The group approached the owner of the site, the local council. Officers were supportive of the idea, and confirmed that the proposal was in line with local policy. The group went on to seek funding, and was successful in its application to Faiths in Action for a two-year project.

The Quakers worked with a local community group, Friends of the Nothe Gardens, active in the site area. Together, they held an open community meeting to see if there was local support for the idea of a peace garden and to see who would like to get involved. Over 50

people came, including local residents, representatives from other faith groups and individuals who were interested in peace and wanted to do something positive. The group gathered lots of ideas for the peace garden, as well as pledges for involvement.

From this meeting, it was possible to pull together a steering group for the project. About ten people have been involved on a regular basis, with other volunteers willing to help on other 'non-committee' tasks, such as creating a website, labouring work on-site, and loaning or contributing materials and equipment. Representatives from several faith groups locally are involved or offered support, including the Quakers, the local Holy Trinity Church, the Bournemouth Islamic Centre, Weymouth Mosque and people from Jewish and Buddhist faith backgrounds.

Since the first meeting in September 2009, the steering group has been meeting regularly. The first task was planning the garden. The steering group developed a brief, using ideas collected at the open community meeting. A local award-winning garden designer was commissioned to draw up a full plan; this was presented to the steering group in October 2009 and they approved it unanimously. 'It was a tremendous design which managed to incorporate everything.'

The steering group then held a planning meeting to draw up a comprehensive workplan, showing what needed to be done and when. The first working party attracted around 25 people, and coverage in the local free paper. Since then, there have been many more work parties putting paths down, treating timber edging, bulb planting and so on.

The group hopes to be ready for an official Opening Day in Spring 2010, when they will plant trees and erect a Peace Pole. The Peace Pole concept is a worldwide initiative started in the 1970s. It will have four sides with the words 'May peace prevail on earth' etched on each side, each in a different language representing different faiths.

The focus is now on getting the garden construction finished. The group will run events during the summer to enable different faith groups to use the space. Work will carry on to develop the garden, as more funds are raised, for example to put up a pergola.

Outcomes

Inter faith activity and relationship outcomes

Broadening people's views

People are starting to learn from one another, asking questions about different faiths. Often these are about practical things, like why some foods are not eaten. People are also learning about local faith groups; as one person commented after getting involved in the project, 'I didn't know there was a mosque in Weymouth.'

People of different faiths and spirituality working together

The project is bringing people together who have not worked together before, including people of no particular faith but who have a spirituality. Early concerns about the project from some faith groups are dissipating as they understand more about the project, and are comfortable that it is not an attempt at conversion.

The beginnings of a network

There is more contact between local faith groups. As the representatives of these groups get to know one another, the tentative roots of a local network are beginning to grow.

Face to Face and Side by Side building block outcomes

Shared spaces for interaction and social action

This is the main focus of this project. A signboard outside the garden will explain what it is, and further information will be available inside. The design incorporates structures to be enjoyed by whoever visits, such as seating areas, a labyrinth and a storytelling area.

Structures and processes which support dialogue and social action

The process of designing and building the garden has provided ongoing opportunities for dialogue between faith groups, people of different faiths and no faith. This includes more formal dialogue, in terms of the work to inform people about the garden and to plan it, as well as many informal conversations as individuals work together on its creation.

A website is in development, which will provide opportunities for communication and links between local faith groups.

Opportunities for learning which build understanding

The working parties have provided great opportunities for informal learning and understanding. As the project's co-ordinator put it, 'If someone's just helped you up after tripping over the wheelbarrow, you'll definitely overcome any uncertainties about talking to them.'

People have recognised that they have many similarities, similar views and similar interests, regardless of their faith background.

The steering group is planning various events and activities in the garden in 2010 which they hope will help people to build their understanding of other faiths. They also hope that the initial work around forming a local inter faith network will come to fruition, so that people can share ideas and learning about their faiths.

Other outcomes

- The project has provided a cause for some people who were looking for one in their community. They have been attracted to the theme of peace, as well as the opportunity to be part of a group.
- The project has cut across local political differences, with councillors from different parties getting involved, and across generations, with everyone from children to retired people taking part.

Overcoming barriers

The project has been very time consuming as everyone involved is a volunteer. There were practical problems of co-ordination, such as being able to be on site during the working day to receive a delivery. The steering group members recognise that the project will take longer to complete working on a purely voluntary basis. Their ethos is all about valuing the different skills and time commitment that different volunteers can bring, for example younger people being able to do the physical work on site, older people being able to help with the paperwork, and a volunteer who lives too far away to be regularly involved offering to set up the website.

There were a couple of objections from home owners nearby who were concerned that they did not know about the project. As second-home owners, they had been unable to attend the community meeting. The co-ordinator worked to allay their concerns by inviting them to visit the site, sending them plans and talking to them on the phone in detail about the project.

Key success factors

- The practical support from other local groups was a great help, such as the loan of a mini-digger, and gazebos for open days.
- The support from the council's parks and gardens department was invaluable. Not only did the department give permission for the garden, but department staff have also helped in practical ways, including doing a tree survey and paying for the removal of dead trees. The head of department also accompanied the project co-ordinator to meet the people concerned about the project.
- The volunteers, who have come out in all weathers to work on the project, and people who have refused payment for tasks that were budgeted for.

With hindsight

The construction element of the work has been very demanding, and it would have taken the pressure off the voluntary project co-ordinator if there had been a paid project manager.

How Faiths in Action funding helped make the project more effective

The funding has acted as a capital fund to kick start the project and to make it happen. Without this, the group would only have been able to work at it bit by bit, and it would not have seemed like a feasible project.

When the project funding finishes

The steering group will try to raise funds to add to the features in the garden to complete some of the ideas raised by local people, for example a special gate into the garden, more benches etc. Maintenance work will be carried out by volunteers.

‘The most significant thing about this project has been ...’

‘... the volume of support from such a wide range of people, which has been absolutely awesome.’

‘Through working on this project, the most important thing I’ve learnt about inter faith working is ...’

‘... to allow time.’

If you were to give one piece of advice to local, regional or national policy makers about the sort of work you’ve been doing, what would it be?

Government policy should not send out mixed messages. If we are being asked to celebrate diversity, do not at the same time make it hard for faith groups to be supported in their work because of an often unfounded fear of proselytism.

Organisation: Dorchester and Weymouth Preparative Meeting (Quakers)

Contact details

Name: Chris Wilson

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Web/blog: The website is in development, but there is an active blogspot, weymouthpeacegarden.blogspot

Grant value: £10,900 over two years

Staff resource: Volunteers, garden designer on contract

Organisation
Cambridge Carbon Footprint

Project name
The Akashi Project

Project purpose

The word ‘akashi’ means ‘sky’ in several south-east Asian languages, which the project team finds to be an inclusive way to start conversations about climate change. The Akashi Project takes the organisation’s existing model of helping people to think about how they can reduce their carbon dioxide emissions, but focuses specifically on helping people from faith groups to come together to do so.

From their previous work with minority ethnic communities, Cambridge Carbon Footprint staff realised the values of faith groups, such as living responsibly and simply, caring about injustice and suffering, could be a source of strength in facing the difficult lifestyle choices posed by climate change and the need for carbon reduction. Project staff also saw the potential of bringing people from different faiths together through a common interest in climate change.

Project activities

Funded for one year, the project has four main areas of activity: ‘Carbon Conversation’ groups, faith group visits, a ‘Faiths and Climate Change’ meeting, and a festival.

The ‘Carbon Conversation’ is a tried and tested approach for Cambridge Carbon Footprint. A group comes together for a six-session course: introductory session, home energy, travel, food, consumption, a concluding session. As well as providing reliable, accessible information about reducing carbon emissions, the course aims to provide a safe space to explore feelings such as fear, guilt and anger which can come up in relation to climate change, an also values and beliefs which can help or hinder action. The course includes a range of activities such as discussions, games and practical ‘do-at-home’ tasks like logging car mileage and monitoring electricity use. The course model has been adapted for

the Akashi Project to include a faith element, so that the group explores how different faith beliefs relate to caring about climate change. The project ran two courses with Buddhist groups, one with Quakers, one with an ecumenical Christian group, one with a Church of England group and one with an inter faith group including Buddhists, Christians, Muslims, and Hindus.

For the faith group visits, a member of the project's staff visited various local faith groups to tell them about the Akashi Project, and in particular the forthcoming festival. The visits have been an opportunity to ask the groups about their thoughts on climate change and to gather knowledge about traditional ways of living more sustainably.

The 'Faiths and Climate Change' meeting in November 2009 brought together around 50 people from six different faiths – Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Judaism, Islam and Sikhism – to hear readings from faith texts linked to the environment and to discuss in small mixed-faith groups 'how faith gives strength to tackle climate change'. The meeting ended with a blessing written by one of the volunteers, incorporating elements from many different faiths, and a shared supper of food brought by several volunteers.

The festival is being held in March 2010. It will include talks, workshops, inter faith discussions, and a room with stalls from different faith and cultural groups focusing on the environment, run over half a day. Four activity areas will get people actively involved and thinking about cutting carbon emissions, with activities such as climate-friendly cookery demonstrations, and a children's competition for the best low carbon neighbourhood. Plenary sessions including dance and musical performances and a multi-faith blessing will open and close the festival. The project staff hope that around 300 people from across Cambridge's ethnic minority and faith communities will take part.

Outcomes

Inter faith activity and relationship outcomes

Providing an opportunity to meet people of different faiths

The project has created several new opportunities for people from

different faith backgrounds to meet, supported by a common interest in the environment.

Getting to know people of other faiths

The volunteers of the festival steering group have got to know one another well through working together to plan the festival, building personal relationships and increasing their understanding of one another's faiths.

Deeper connections

The participants in the Carbon Conversation courses were very interested in how others' personal perspectives on the environment were informed by their faith. This has led to a sense of deeper connection between themselves and people of other faiths.

Face to Face and Side by Side building block outcomes

Structures and processes that support dialogue and social action

The main thrusts of the project are exactly these – dialogue and social action. All of the activities were designed with the specific aim of bringing people together for in-depth discussion about faith and the environment, and then encouraging them in taking action.

Opportunities for learning which build understanding

The learning which is focused on reducing carbon dioxide emission and climate change has also acted as a pathway towards raising awareness and increasing understanding about other faiths.

The learning enabled people to identify and share 'common ground', seeing how each of their faiths had something to say about the environment.

Other outcomes

Project staff hope that as a result of doing the Carbon Conversation course, participants will change their behaviour to reduce carbon dioxide emissions.

Overcoming barriers

The project team had intended to run workshops on climate change, but found these were not suitable for all faith

communities, perhaps because workshops were not often used by these communities. Instead, staff set up more informal visits and meetings at a community member's house. Language was a problem with some groups; the recruitment of an Urdu-speaking worker helped with this.

Key success factors

- The Urdu-speaking worker was very well known in many of the minority communities because of her own background, which helped with introducing the project and its work to them.
- Although part time, it made a tremendous difference to employ two staff members, as they give the project capacity to deliver its planned activities. The staff were supported by volunteers, who helped with a lot of the work.
- 'Providing nice food for the people who got involved!'

With hindsight

Overall, the project is running smoothly. However, it would have been easier with more staff time. Also, the project co-ordinator notes that the project's ability to achieve what they have done in the time available is due in part to working with a model they were already familiar with.

How Faiths in Action funding helped make the project more effective

Having funding is crucial, as it is paying for staff time. The scale of the project is more than could be handled by volunteers alone.

When the project funding finishes

Cambridge Carbon Footprint will look for other grants to enable them to do more of this sort of work. There is great enthusiasm among the volunteers to continue with inter faith meetings, along the lines of the November 2009 'Faith and Climate Change' meeting, and perhaps to broaden their scope beyond the environment.

'The most significant thing about this project has been ...'
'... people making connections with other people they wouldn't

otherwise have come into contact with, and finding much in common.’

‘Through working on this project, the most important thing I’ve learnt about inter faith working is ...’

‘... how satisfying it is when people get together, really listen to each other talking about beliefs and values, and find such a lot in common.’

If you were to give advice to local, regional or national policy makers about the sort of work you’ve been doing, what would it be?

Recognise the value and importance of this sort of work. Continue to support and fund it. Be aware that it takes time to build up and that it is likely to be far more effective with long-term funding.

Organisation: Cambridge Carbon Footprint

Contact details

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Grant value: £10,269 over one year

Staff resource: Two part-time staff members



Chapter Four

Dialogue

Introduction

In this theme, the following case studies are presented:

Conflict and Change

A training and support programme to develop women's skills and confidence to be able to facilitate their own inter faith events (page 50).

West Berkshire Minority Ethnic Forum

A mentoring project between the local police and Muslims, educating the police officers about inter faith working and also building informal communication (page 57).

Bolton Lads and Girls Club

A youth club service for girls only, giving them the chance to meet and talk to girls from other faith backgrounds (page 61).

Sound It Out

Using choral music to bring individuals and groups from different faith and cultural backgrounds together (page 66).

Redbridge Faith Forum

Delivery of several evening events for women, to give them the chance to meet one another in a safe environment to discuss topics of interest to them (page 72)

A few key messages

- There needs to be an impetus to make dialogue happen. It is important that people feel able to talk to others. Conflict and Change's project is all about giving people the skills and confidence to help others to talk. Many project managers also spoke about creating a safe space for dialogue. Often, this involves giving women the chance to meet in a single sex environment, as the Bolton Lads and Girls Club and the Redbridge Faith Forum have done.
- Dialogue can be brought about in different ways. Some projects are designed so that dialogue is the prime focus of a project; in other cases, it is intentional but develops as a result of a particular activity. For example, the West Berkshire Minority Ethnic Forum and the Redbridge Faith Forum's projects have created a means for people of different faiths to meet, with the clear aim of enabling them to talk to one another. Bolton Lads and Girls Club and Sound It Out have taken a slightly different approach, by providing an activity of common interest which acts as a backdrop for meeting and talking.
- Dialogue needs time to develop. There is a process of first making connections between individuals, and then gradually the conversations take on more depth as people learn more about one another and the feelings of trust and respect develop. Time and again, project managers noted that successful inter faith dialogue is built on personal relationships, something that all of these projects have been working to achieve in a variety of ways.

Organisation
Conflict and Change

Project name
Building Bridges in Newham

Project purpose

The project's aim is to develop women's skills and to provide them with the tools and confidence to be able to facilitate their own inter faith events. Ultimately, the intention is to create a greater richness in inter faith working, building trust between faith communities. The project fits very closely with the wider work of Conflict and Change, which focuses on building trust between communities in a range of ways.

The underlying ethos is one of building relationships, based on finding connections relating to one another's experiences. The organisation finds this works well in relation to inter faith activity, as it moves people away from doctrine and theology, which can cause tension.

Project activities

The project grew out of an earlier Conflict and Change project called 'Community Conversations'. Through this project, staff within the organisation began to work with groups, including people from faith communities. It became clear that there was a need to open up inter faith working to more women, as well as to offer more interactive ways of working.

The Building Bridges in Newham project focuses on women, building on their interest in using their own experiences as a basis for training and learning, and on their sense of the importance of building relationships.

The team designed a training course to be delivered one day a week over four weeks, based on materials and approaches that they had previously developed. The course has been reshaped considerably to give it an emphasis on faith. For example, they

ask participants to think about how they can incorporate their spirituality in preparing for the inter faith events they will be running. One participant lays out the circle of chairs before the day starts, then blesses them.

To date, two full courses have been run and a third is about to start. The project intends to run three courses per year. Ideally, 12 women will take part in each course. This number fits the size of the training room, works well with the training methods and makes it feasible to do follow-up work with the participants.

Each of the women who takes part is encouraged to facilitate her own event or series of events after the course, and part of the project focuses on providing support for this. The trainer is at the end of the phone or email to answer questions. In some cases, the trainer also attends the events. In addition, staff from Conflict and Change have set up a network for people who have completed the course, so that they can meet up informally once every three months to share stories of success, swap hints and help one another.

The courses so far have mostly involved Muslim women and women of various Christian denominations, including Anglicans, Methodists, Catholics and women from the Pentecostal church. The intention is to extend this reach in future training courses, particularly to include Hindus and Sikhs.

The courses are very hands-on, and offer women both training in techniques and the chance to think about and plan for their own events after the course. The framework for the course is as follows:

Day 1

- What participants want from the course, and their hopes and fears.
- What do we mean by 'facilitation'?
- What is the role of a facilitator?
- Creating a safe space for participants to explore issues.
- Thinking about the sort of inter faith event each person might want to put on, and early ideas for shaping it.

Day 2

- The four areas of being a good facilitator – that is, personal preparation, body language, communication skills, asking good questions.
- A facilitation practice session, using a relevant topic as an example, such as ‘What faith means to me.’

Day 3

- Learning styles.
- Difficult dynamics in inter faith groups and how to deal with them.
- More detailed planning of each person’s event (in small groups, helping one another).
- A practice session, based on some of the ideas for events.

Day 4

- The elephant in the room – that is, what things do we not usually talk about and how can we talk about them? This might include Islamic clothing, for example, or the real differences in people’s beliefs and perceptions of one another.
- Individual one-minute presentations by each person about their planned event.
- A ‘consultancy’ for each person specifically about the event they are planning.
- Evaluation of the course.

Outcomes

Inter faith activity and relationship outcomes

Increasing the level of inter faith activity

Already there is more inter faith work being done in Newham and nearby, as the women start to run the events that they planned during the training courses. For example, one woman has brought together a group of parents from her child’s school; another woman has held meetings in her own home and is now involved in setting up an informal group to organise an inter faith

children's party; someone else has run a series of evening events for women, including visits to local places of worship.*

Making new friendships

Individual friendships are growing, particularly as women pair up to support each other's events. The training, which is all about building relationships, is itself helping to build the participants' relationships.

More talking

Women feel encouraged to talk because it's a women-only environment, and are gaining confidence to have their say.

A catalyst for action

Many women already had an interest in inter faith work, but did not know how to go about it or did not have the confidence to try. The training has 'lit the match' and the women are putting their enthusiasm into practice.

Face to Face and Side by Side building block outcomes

Developing the skills to bridge and link

The women are gaining core facilitation skills, so the events that they run provide a platform for several more women to meet and link with one another.

Women are also becoming more confident about taking on the role of facilitator.

Shared spaces for interaction and social action

Part of the work is about creating spaces for interaction, whether in one's own home or elsewhere. The women have learnt about the importance of creating a safe space, where people can feel comfortable to meet and talk to one another.

Structures and processes which support dialogue and social action

As more training courses are completed, the numbers in the follow-up support network will grow. The co-ordinator hopes that the project can maintain the initial interest shown and that

* See page 72 for Redbridge Faith Forum case study, which covers this.

members will benefit from one another's experiences and learning, as well as the active support of other women.

Opportunities for learning which build understanding

The events run by the women after the training create many different sorts of learning opportunities. Not all of the women have run their events yet, but the numbers will increase as more women complete the training.

Other outcomes

- For Conflict and Change, the project has helped to embed inter faith working within its overall work on building relationships and trust. They are using ideas from this project in other pieces of work, and vice versa.
- Women who have successfully completed the course are now showing interest in other courses run by Conflict and Change.

Overcoming barriers

Recruitment has been difficult. The original plan was for another local organisation to receive a portion of the Faiths in Action funding to do this part of the work, but this did not work out, due to staff changes. The project manager has therefore had to rely on Conflict and Change's existing contacts. However, another local organisation with which they have a close relationship, the Muslim Mediation Service, is now taking on the recruitment role and hopes to be able to attract women from a wider variety of faith backgrounds for the forthcoming courses.

In the first year the delivery schedule was rather tight, due to the timing of the funding. In the second year there will be more time, which will take the pressure off a bit.

Key success factors

- The methodology of the course, including the follow-up, has helped people to direct their enthusiasm and has supported them afterwards with running their events.
- There have been opportunities for the course participants to continue to meet and to build their own relationships, which gives a sense of ongoing support.

- It made all the difference having existing networks to call on, to overcome the early difficulties with recruitment.

With hindsight

It would probably have been better to build more time into the project plan and to have a larger budget to cover follow-ups for the participants, so that their support needs could be met more fully.

How Faiths in Action funding helped make the project more effective

Conflict and Change would not have been able to develop or deliver this course without the funding.

When the project funding finishes

The project staff and a number of course participants have come together to form a steering group to consider what to do next. They are keen to continue the work and are thinking about how best to do this – for example, whether to offer this course as part of other work done by Conflict and Change, or to seek specific faith-related funding to run the courses again separately. One idea is to run a similar course just for men.

‘The most significant thing about this project has been ...’

‘... the enthusiasm and commitment with which people have gone on to facilitate their activities ... the passion for inter faith relations.’

‘Through working on this project, the most important thing I’ve learnt about inter faith working is ...’

‘... that setting up a context for people to get to know one another and for deeper sharing is really important for inter faith understanding. It doesn’t just happen; it needs some tools and processes to happen, combined with commitment and passion.’

If you were to give one piece of advice to local, regional or national policy makers about the sort of work you’ve been doing, what would it be?

If there is to be funding for inter faith work, it should support work that focuses on building and sustaining relationships. It is

important for people of faith to get to know one another, regardless of government agendas.

Organisation: Conflict and Change

Contact details

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Grant value: £12,000 over two years

Staff resource: One part-time co-ordinator, paid trainer, input from other staff

Organisation

West Berkshire Minority Ethnic Forum

Project name

Building Bridges Across Faiths

Project purpose

The project aims to educate officers in the public sector about inter faith work, and at the same time build informal communication between Muslims and public sector officers.

Building on an idea from the Chair of the Forum and discussions with public sector leaders, the Forum applied for Faiths in Action funding for a two-year project.

Project activities

The project has focused initially on the police. The project has paired 16 officers with Muslims across West Berkshire, with the Muslim person as mentor and the police officer as mentee. The police mentees are from all ranks of the force, including superintendent, chief inspector, custody officer and community officers. The Forum recruited the mentors from all sections of the local Muslim community.

The mentors receive no formal training, as the intention is for the pairs to talk informally and to have the flexibility to choose what they talk about. However, both parties receive a simple leaflet, explaining what the project is about and containing some guidelines – for example, it suggests that they give personal details only if they feel comfortable to do so. The kinds of topics that the pairs cover during their mentoring sessions include the person's roles in their community, faith and culture, and police duties towards minority ethnic communities.

The pairs each meet four times a year, in a place and at a time of their own choosing. After each session, the mentor and the mentee both give feedback via an online form. This enables the Forum to check what the pairs are learning and that all is going well. Every six

months, the Forum's project manager meets the chief of police and the chief executive of the local authority to review progress.

In addition, there have been two sessions where the police bring all eight mentees together to share their learning. This feeds into articles in the police press to disseminate the learning more widely among colleagues.

Outcomes

Inter faith activity and relationship outcomes

Breaking down barriers

All of the participants now feel comfortable about getting together and talking about a variety of issues. This informal relationship is new, and is valued on both sides.

New inter faith activities at an individual level

Although the project did not specifically intend this, the mentors and mentees have begun to do other things together, in addition to holding the mentoring meetings. For example, a Catholic police officer invited a group of Muslims to visit a Sunday lunch church gathering. The Muslims brought halal food, the Christians brought their own, and they ate together after a presentation by the Muslims and a short question-and-answer session.

New inter faith activities at an organisation level

The police and the Muslim community have begun other inter faith initiatives, including two five-a-side football games and a cricket tournament. This kind of social bonding has helped to break down barriers, as the participants and their friends and families have shared food and drink, and had fun together.

Face to Face and Side by Side building block outcomes

Structures and processes which support dialogue and social action

Both the police and the Muslim community have become more confident about interacting, which has led to the mosque inviting the police to visit every fourth Friday. The police are now welcomed and there is a lot of open interaction. In addition, the mosque is now established as a third-party reporting centre for

hate crime,^{*} after two mentors raised the issue with their mentees that Muslims did not always feel comfortable reporting hate crime at a police station.

The visibility of the project is building a wider community awareness and willingness to get together and do things together.

Opportunities for learning which build understanding

The wider social activities, involving other people beyond the mentor pairs, have provided an excellent opportunity for interaction, with wives and other family members also beginning to talk to one another, for example.

Other outcomes

The police officers have a better understanding about the kinds of approaches that might work in West Berkshire in relation to other government agendas.

Overcoming barriers

It has sometimes been difficult for the mentor pairs to find times to meet that suit them both. This has been a particular problem for police officers, who are on shifts and who may need to respond to emergencies. The participants have made a real effort to be flexible. In addition, the chief of police has made it possible for officers to claim overtime to go to mentoring meetings, if necessary.

Key success factors

- It has worked well for all potential participants to fill in an information form at the start, so that the pairings are as good a fit as possible – for example, by putting people together who live close to each other, or who are of the same gender.
- It has been important to choose appropriate meeting places – for example, restaurants serving halal food, and coffee bars instead of pubs, so that the premises are alcohol-free.

* 'Hate crime' is defined by the Home Office as any crime that is motivated by hostility or prejudice based upon the victim's disability, race, religion or belief, sexual orientation or transgender.

How Faiths in Action funding helped make the project more effective

Without the funding, the project would not have taken place. The funding has covered the cost of setting up and managing the project, as well as paying the restaurant bills for the mentor pairs.

The grant has enabled the Forum to put all of the processes needed to run the project in place, so any future work will not need the same level of investment.

When the project funding finishes

The Forum has already secured further funding and has begun to expand the project through working with other organisations, including a large housing association and the local council. The police are expanding the scheme as well, working with Indian people new to the UK.

‘The most significant thing about this project has been ...’
‘... its simplicity and its effectiveness.’

‘Through working on this project, the most important thing I’ve learnt about inter faith working is ...’
‘... that there are more similarities than there are differences.’

If you were to give one piece of advice to local, regional or national policymakers about the sort of work you’ve been doing, what would it be?

A simple community engagement initiative at local level is more effective than a national project.

Organisation: West Berkshire Minority Ethnic Forum

Contact details

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Grant value: £10,730 over two years

Staff resource: Part-time project management support plus volunteers

Organisation

Bolton Lads and Girls Club

Project name

Just4Girls

Project purpose

Bolton Lads and Girls Club has a history of more than 100 years, during which it has provided a wide range of activities for young people aged 8 to 21 (and up to 25 for young people with disabilities). The Just4Girls project is one of the club's targeted services. It was set up about ten years ago in response to a specific need which the club identified.

Just4Girls aims to provide a youth club service for girls only, so that girls who are not able to mix with lads can take part. The Faiths in Action grant has provided two years' funding to enable the Just4Girls project to continue and to include activities based around faith. Girls from many different faiths and cultures take part. Most are Muslims, but there are also Christian, Buddhist, Hindu and Jewish girls.

Project activities

The club has its own buildings, housing a wide variety of facilities, including a sports centre, a performing arts studio, an arts and crafts centre and a kitchen. Every Sunday afternoon the whole building is given over to Just4Girls. The club has about 200 members, mostly aged 12 to 16. There are usually 60 to 80 girls attending a session. The project also organises residential.

A part-time project leader organises activities, with support from youth workers and volunteers. The girls themselves choose the activities. They have the chance to take part in a monthly informal consultation about what they would like the project to include and what sort of activities there might be.

As part of the overall programme, the project team has included activities focused around faith days. During the last year, this has included Eid, Diwali, Buddha Day, Ganesh, the Jewish and

Chinese New Year festivals, Christmas and Ascension Day. The project leader plans activities that allow for informal learning, using creative ways to help club members think about what faith means. Girls might do artwork or collages, or spend some time reading and then preparing a five minute performance, or they might write poems.

Outcomes

Inter faith activity and relationship outcomes

Meeting people of another faith

For many girls, this is the only opportunity they have had to meet people from another faith, as this does not tend to happen during their day-to-day activities.

Making friendships

During their time with the project, some girls have made strong friendships with people from other faith backgrounds, which have been sustained after they stop coming to Just4Girls.

Organisational relationships

The club's links with local faith organisations have strengthened, including those with the Bolton Inter Faith Forum.

Face to Face and Side by Side building block outcomes

Developing the skills to bridge and link

The activities that the project provides aim to develop life skills, such as communication skills, teamwork and tolerance. All of these help the girls to make the most of the 'linking' opportunity provided by the project.

Shared spaces for interaction and social action

Just4Girls has created a space which is accessible to many girls who would not otherwise have the chance to get involved in a youth club. It is a safe space where parents are happy for their children to spend time.

Structures and processes which support dialogue and social action

As the girls get involved, the informal discussions that take place during the activities (whether these are faith related or not) help them to break down any perceived barriers. Some girls may have

misconceptions about people from other faiths, which can be reconsidered as they have the chance to talk to people from other faiths, perhaps for the first time.

Opportunities for learning which build understanding

The girls talk about the fun they have had doing the various activities and trying out new things. This is a positive reflection on how the organisation has tried to respond to the needs of these young people, by using learning and teaching styles that suit them, especially informal approaches.

Other outcomes

The club has been able to work in a more integrated fashion with faith communities.

Overcoming barriers

The work has been running smoothly. As with the club's other activities, attendance can fluctuate. However, the staff are used to this. On the basis of their experience, they can predict and plan for times when there are likely to be lower numbers – for example, during Ramadan. Also, the project leader tries to co-ordinate with other organisations such as the Bolton Council of Mosques, that also provide activities for young people in the area, to ensure that there are no clashes and no replication of activities.

Key success factors

- The volunteers are fundamental to the club's ability to run the sessions. Usually between six and eight volunteers help each week. As many of them are previous members, they are able to connect well with the girls, and they are always upbeat and positive.
- 'We do what they want to do.' The fact that the service is led by the girls is vital. This gives them a sense of confidence in the club and ensures that its activities remain interesting and continue to attract members.
- The environment itself is really important, as it provides a space to which girls are able to come and gives them the chance to use facilities that they would not otherwise have access to.

With hindsight

As an ongoing project with a history of some years, the organisation is happy with its approach. If and when new issues crop up, the club always tries to be responsive and to find ways of dealing with them.

How Faiths in Action funding helped make the project more effective

The funding has been crucial in enabling the project to continue, and also to expand.

Beyond this, the networking opportunities offered by CDF are seen as very valuable, as the club has been able to make links and share experiences with organisations outside the Bolton area that it would not usually come across.

When the project funding finishes

The club is very keen to continue to provide the Just4Girls club. The club's fundraisers will explore a number of avenues, including funding from statutory sources, from foundations, trusts and businesses, and from its own fundraising events.

'The most significant thing about this project has been ...'

'... to be able to continue to provide a unique service that meets the needs of our members ... something that's part of their childhood and development.'

'Through working on this project, the most important thing I've learnt about inter faith working is ...'

'... that there are so many organisations out there working to promote inter faith work ... a real eye opener ... also, that you can offer inter faith work in a flexible, informal, interactive way where young people can learn for themselves.'

If you were to give one piece of advice to local, regional or national policymakers about the sort of work you've been doing, what would it be?

Any way that the government – locally, regionally or nationally – can support this sort of work would be welcome, particularly because the funding environment is getting harder. However, it's

not just money that's needed – it's also important to have other support, such as networking.

Organisation: Bolton Lads and Girls Club

Contact details

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Grant value: £12,000 over two years

Staff resource: One part-time leader, part-time youth workers plus volunteers

Organisation
Sound It Out
Project name
Choral Fusion

Project purpose

The aim of the project was to bring together individuals and groups from different faith and cultural backgrounds, through singing.

Project activities

The project focused on ‘a cappella’ (unaccompanied) singing. Under the direction of a specially recruited, experienced artistic director, the project involved people from six very different choirs: a Sikh ladies’ choir, a Muslim ladies’ choir, a Christian gospel choir, a mixed faith group singing medieval Christian music, a mixed faith group singing spiritual world music and a Hindu singing group.

The project started with two professional development days for the choir leaders. The idea was to give them all a chance to get to know one another and learn about the choirs, to set the artistic direction, and, most importantly, to give them time to discuss the ground rules for working together. This was a very open discussion, setting the parameters for the project so that faith sensitivities were taken into account and everyone was clear about how they wanted to work together.

This was followed by five one-day sessions with all the choirs. The first one was designed as a ‘taster’ session, with a variety of ice-breaker singing exercises. The other sessions all followed the same pattern: a warm-up; one choir leader teaching the whole group a song typical of their own repertoire; a shared lunch, to which everyone contributed food; then, in the afternoon, everyone working together to create a ‘fusion’ piece of music which reflected all the different music traditions. Each one-day session finished with a slot for a guest speaker. This focused on different faiths,

with either a choir member or someone else from that faith giving a short presentation about the role of music in their faith, followed by a question-and-answer session.

Finally, the project staged a concert in Birmingham's Old Library building. The first half of the programme was given over to each choir singing one or two pieces from their own repertoire, then leading the whole group in the song that they had taught the group. The second half of the performance was the group fusion piece of music, lasting 24 minutes.

Outcomes

Inter faith activity and relationship outcomes

Forming friendships

People from the different choirs have begun to form friendships with people of different faiths, based around a common interest in singing. Music was the key that unlocked conversations.

Wider faith awareness

Through planning and working together, the project members have learnt a lot about other faiths. The commitment to open and frank discussion about the differences between faiths, and to working together, has enabled people to become far more aware about particular elements of different faiths, such as the role of women.

Breaking down barriers

The common interest in music has helped to break down barriers and start conversations between people of different backgrounds. For example, women from the Hindu singing group were particularly interested in the gospel music, and they began to bond with the gospel singers through sharing their music.

Face to Face and Side by Side building block outcomes

Developing the skills to bridge and link

The choir leaders have increased their knowledge about how to involve people of other faiths in music, including practical measures such as scheduling of events and how to consider various sensitivities relating to faith. These sensitivities include considerations such as: lyrics (for example, not mentioning any

prophet); accompaniments (for example, a cappella is generally more acceptable); audience (for example, sometimes single gender audiences are most appropriate); appropriate wording on publicity materials (for example, calling a performance a cultural event rather than a music concert); and appropriate venues (for example, not choosing a place licensed to serve alcohol).

Structures and processes which support dialogue and social action

The project very consciously aimed for transparent discussion about how the different faith groups should work together, with the process of joint planning designed to bring sensitivities and concerns out into the open. This has created a true partnership approach.

Opportunities for learning which build understanding

The guest speaker slot at the end of each day's session provided more formal learning that helped to reinforce the informal learning from the singing and lunchtime conversations.

This model for inter faith learning through singing is now tried and tested, and ready for use in other places and by other people.

Other outcomes

- The project gave smaller faith choirs the opportunity to perform to mixed faith audiences, which they would not otherwise have had access to, and gave these audiences the chance to hear the faith choirs, which they probably would not otherwise have done.
- This has been an opportunity for Sound It Out as an organisation to increase its profile among faith communities in Birmingham. In particular, it has been able to build up the database of musicians to include more faith-based groups and therefore to be more representative of its area.

Overcoming barriers

One difficulty for the project was the short timeframe allocated by Sound It Out in which to deliver the project. While it was important to keep the times between the sessions short (because there was a lot of music to learn and remember!), this created

pressures for the choirs to achieve all that they wanted. The choir leaders changed their original plans for the content of the one-day sessions, so that the volume of work was more manageable.

The organisation also faced some difficulties because of the length of time from when it applied for funding to hearing that it had been successful. A couple of the choirs that had expressed an interest in taking part were then unable to do so because of other commitments, so Sound It Out then had only a short time to find suitable replacements. However, the project manager was able to do this by using the organisation's existing networks and relationships.

Key success factors

- The organisation and the choir leaders went through a very careful planning process, so that the project could become a real partnership. In particular, they note that they really listened to others and that everyone was open and honest about how they could work together.
- The choir leaders and members had positive and open attitudes, with everyone keen to take part and get involved.
- The lunches were an unexpected success, in terms of bringing people together. Sharing food worked very well, as did having the time for informal conversation.
- The guest speaker slot 'added another dimension', helping to build up a knowledge base for participants that backed up the personal interactions.

With hindsight

It would have been useful to have compiled a calendar of faith celebrations falling during the project period, to avoid clashes in the schedule and/or to make sure that guest speaker slots coincided with these.

In terms of the music repertoire covered during the sessions, it might have been better to be slightly less ambitious. It was quite a challenge for the choirs to learn so many different songs in different languages. If Sound it Out does such a project again, with a similar budget and amount of time, the project manager thinks it

would be preferable to devote more time to the group fusion piece, as this would still enable the choirs to reflect the different faiths' music, but would not present so many challenges for the choir members.

Finally, more marketing and publicity for the concert might have been useful, in order to raise the profile of the project. This would be possible with a slightly longer timeframe.

How Faiths in Action funding helped make the project more effective

The project was solely funded by Faiths in Action, so all of the outcomes are directly due to the grant awarded. The key benefit for Sound It Out is that the project has improved its knowledge of faith-based considerations and faith-based choir groups in Birmingham.

When the project funding finishes

The project officially finished with the concert performance in December 2009. However, the project is maintaining momentum and the choir leaders are now meeting to discuss a programme of activities to take the performance out to each of the participating faith communities. The project has created a structure that has the potential to carry on after the formal ending of the project.

Sound It Out is using the learning from the project to produce a resource pack about good practice in inter faith working for music groups and arts organisations. The organisation hopes that this will be widely disseminated and used. In addition, it has already contributed to an event run by the Department for Communities and Local Government on the role of choirs in contributing to social cohesion, and it hopes to do more to promote such work.

Sound It Out has won funding for a similar project with a focus on intergenerational choral activity. Two of the choirs from the Faiths in Action project will be involved, and the other choirs have been invited to take part in the open access elements of the project.

‘The most significant thing about this project has been ...’

‘... that the choirs want to continue working together and to perform the material to their own communities ... that the relationships formed are real and are being sustained.’

‘Through working on this project, the most important thing I’ve learnt about inter faith working is ...’

‘... not to have any preconceptions about what faith groups are willing to do ... and to ask people the question directly.’

If you were to give advice to local, regional or national policymakers about the sort of work you have been doing, what would it be?

This sort of work is not short term; it needs sustained funding and support. The real need is to engage with those who need the most convincing, and it takes time to build up the trust needed to do this.

Organisation: Sound It Out Community Music

Contact details

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Grant value: £12,000 over one year

Staff resource: Artistic director and choir leaders on freelance basis for professional development days and sessions, plus part-time project co-ordinator

Organisation
Redbridge Faith Forum

Project name
Women's Inter Faith Evenings

Project purpose

The project aims to give local women in Redbridge the chance to meet one another in a safe environment, to discuss topics of interest to them.

This fits in with the Faith Forum's overall aim of promoting community cohesion in a multi-faith environment through celebrating the things that bring people together.

Project activities

There is a small management committee, made up of four women from different faith backgrounds – Muslim, Christian, Jewish and Baha'i. The project co-ordinator is employed by the Faith Forum as an administrator. She has received training from Conflict and Change* in running inter faith activities. The other members of the management committee are volunteers.

The management committee and the women taking part have designed the project together. It comprises four two-hour workshops and a conference, to be held in March 2010.

The workshop sessions cover the following topics:

1. Work planning – looking at what the project is about and discussing with the women what topics to cover and how.
2. Getting to know you – prioritising the topics and spending time getting to know one another through ice-breaker activities.
3. A common understanding of what we mean by faith.
4. Inner peace and spirituality.

* See page 50 for the case study on Conflict and Change, which gives more details about the training.

The theme of the conference will be ‘Harmony in the home? How do we deal with the stresses?’

To date, three sessions have been completed. Between 25 and 45 women have attended each one; some women have attended all of them, while others have come to one or two sessions.

The third and fourth sessions begin with a presentation on the theme for the evening, followed by a question-and-answer session. After that, there are small group activities on the chosen topic. The women then come back into one group and discuss their findings together.

The first session was held in a community centre so that the women could feel that they were in a neutral place, but the subsequent sessions were at places of worship – a Hindu temple, a Sikh gurdwara and a Jewish synagogue. The conference will be held in a library; again, this is intended to be a neutral venue, so that no woman feels that there is a barrier to taking part.

Outcomes

Inter faith activity and relationship outcomes

Meeting women from other faiths

Most of the women taking part would not usually have the chance to meet women from other faiths, so this project has given them a new opportunity. Friendships are beginning to form.

Breaking down barriers

As the women have talked to one another, they have overcome perceptions about difference. The most important first step was gaining the confidence to approach women of other faiths and to begin talking.

Having fun

The women talk about how much they are enjoying themselves.

Face to Face and Side by Side building block outcomes

Developing the skills to bridge and link

This is a key factor, which is helping the women to become more confident about making connections with women from other faiths.

Shared spaces for interaction and social action

Getting the meeting space right has been really important, as it has helped to create the feeling of a safe space for women to meet and talk.

Structures and processes which support dialogue and social action

The process that the project follows and the structure of each session have given the women the opportunity to ask questions about other faiths, which they would not otherwise have asked.

Visiting places of worship has helped to create dialogue, with the faith that is the focus of the visit as the starting point for discussion. The atmosphere of hospitality has been important in building relationships, between individuals and also between the Faith Forum and the places of worship.

Opportunities for learning which build understanding

The project was designed to create opportunities specifically for women to build understanding about other faiths.

Overcoming barriers

There is a lot of work involved in planning, organising and following up the sessions and the conference. The co-ordinator has the support of the female management committee, and also works hard to fit everything in around her role as administrator.

Key success factors

- The training on how to host an inter faith workshop was invaluable, giving the project co-ordinator the confidence and the skills to run this project. The materials from the course have worked very well, and the ongoing support by phone and through the trainer's attendance at events has been very helpful.
- The women taking part have been 'really open, interested, excited and happy to be there'.
- Visiting faith buildings helped to build links with faith groups.

With hindsight

The co-ordinator believes that the Faith Forum should have asked for more funding, as the project activities have taken far more time to organise than anticipated. However, the basic model works well; it will be maintained in future work.

How Faiths in Action funding helped make the project more effective

Without the funding, the project would not have taken place.

In addition, the project has helped the Faith Forum to open up and to learn about the level of interest that there is among 'ordinary, everyday' women for this sort of work.

When the project funding finishes

The management committee and the Faith Forum have not yet begun to plan beyond the funding period, as they are not yet half-way through the project. They will see what the women taking part want to do and perhaps they will then seek other funding, if necessary.

'The most significant thing about this project has been ...'
'... the overwhelming response from the women who attend.'

'Through working on this project, the most important thing I've learnt about inter faith working is ...'
'... that it's such a high ... I get to meet all these women I wouldn't usually meet ... I hope we've made a difference and that people take something home with them.'

If you were to give one piece of advice to local, regional or national policymakers about the sort of work you've been doing, what would it be?

Sometimes people just look at the outputs, such as the numbers of participants. But with this sort of work, it's quality that's important. If you touch a handful of people and they pass it on, that's important.

Organisation: Redbridge Faith Forum

Contact details

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Grant value: £11,968 over two years

Staff resource: One part-time staff member, plus volunteers

Chapter Five

Young people

Introduction

In this theme, the following case studies are presented:

Across Communities

Bringing young people across Newcastle together for a series of activities and a residential weekend to raise their awareness of other faiths and build bridges between faith communities (page 79).

Smethwick Youth and Community Centre

Running a 12-week training programme for young people to discuss and increase their understanding about faith (page 84).

Oxygen

Using performance and visual arts to engage young people in thinking about spiritual values (page 89).

St John's Wood Adventure Playground

Introducing faith into children's play environment through visits to local places of worship including hands-on activities, and follow-up activities at the playground (page 94).

Burnley Youth Theatre

Bringing two groups of young people together to work with a community artist to create a sculpture representing all faiths in Burnley (page 98).

Leeds Jewish Representative Council

Using cricket to get young people from different faith backgrounds to mix with one another and break down barriers and misconceptions (page 103).

A few key messages

- Organisations not specifically set up to work with young people do see a value in working with young people. The important thing is to design a project which is targeted at young people's needs and ways of learning and relating to one another.
- There are ways of working which are particularly effective with children and young people. They tend to respond well to learning through doing, and activities need to have an element of fun, which helps to maintain children's and young people's interest. Sacred Space and Burnley Youth Theatre used arts-based work to give young people a focus for their project. Across Communities and the Smethwick Youth and Community Centre put on activities completely unrelated to the main aim of the project, such as theme park visits, which acted as rewards and incentives for young people.
- Choosing a particular theme for a project can act as a catalyst for bringing people of different faiths together. The participants then have a common interest which not only helps to get conversations going early on, but remains as a 'glue' to reinforce the relationships as they develop over time. For example, the Leeds Jewish Representative Council's project focused on cricket to achieve this.
- Bringing a faith perspective to non-faith-based organisations allows them to reflect their local communities and the issues that concern them. For example St John's Wood Adventure Playground was able to introduce different faiths as part of play at an early age to local children.

Organisation
Across Communities
Project name
Young People's Project

Project purpose

The project aimed to grow young people's awareness of one another's faiths and cultures, in order to help understanding and to build bridges between communities.

Project activities

Across Communities was founded in 2003 when a group of people of faith realised that there was nothing available in Newcastle for young people who wanted to get together to discuss their different faiths. This particular project was the idea of the young people's management group within Across Communities. The young people are chosen by their peers and their role is to take their ideas to the overall organisation steering group. This is made up of adults from various different faith organisations in the city.

Faiths in Action funded a one-year project where Across Communities brought young people from across Newcastle together for a series of activities, culminating in two residential weekends away, one for girls, one for boys.

To get the ball rolling, the project volunteers arranged meetings with local faith leaders to introduce the project and to gain their support. Across Communities held a first event to which all faith leaders were invited, along with six or seven young people from their community. Many of these young people went on to participate in the project.

The project involved young people aged 15–23 from a variety of faith backgrounds: Christianity, Islam, Sikhism, Hinduism and those of no faith. The project attracted around 85 young people; of these, 44 attended the residential (25 girls and 19 boys).

The project began with activities like Bollywood dancing and music to enable the young people to get to know one another and build trust. Following on from this, the steering group organised a series of visits to places of worship around the city so that the young people could ‘get a feel for’ the buildings and learn about what happened there. There were also sessions for the adult volunteers, which were used mainly to prepare for the residential.

Over the course of the project, the steering group organised four consultation sessions to give young people the opportunity to talk to the adults about how they thought the project was going. The young people used these sessions to put forward ideas for other project activities.

Each residential was held over two days from midday to midday, and the same agenda was used for each, aimed at keeping the momentum going throughout. The following activities were included:

- an ice-breaker exercise
- discussion sessions on ‘What my faith means to me’, ‘Barriers to practising faith’ and ‘What do you think or feel when you think of God’
- an art workshop – drawing an image of something holy, a faith symbol, or something else to depict what faith meant to them
- a meditation exercise – trying out Tai Chi
- a sacred dance
- a bonfire together
- watching the film ‘East is East’.

The young people, the young people’s management group and the organisation’s steering group are now evaluating the project, reflecting on what could be done better and looking at ways to follow up on the projects’ achievements.

Outcomes

Inter faith activity and relationship outcomes

Making friends

Several of the young people are making friends with people from other faiths. Many would not have had such an opportunity without the project.

Building understanding

The young people now understand more about the basic tenets of other beliefs. However, it is not just the young people who are learning – the adults who bring the young people to the activities are also getting involved and picking up knowledge.

New inter faith activity

Some of the parents are now developing an inter faith project for women in the community.

Face to Face and Side by Side building block outcomes

Structures and processes that support dialogue and social action

Some of the young people are now keen to work on key issues that affect them and to take action, for example forced marriages.

The project built young people's confidence to participate fully in activities and discussions. In particular, this was possible because the young people could believe that they would not be judged for what they said.

Opportunities for learning which build understanding

The focus of the project was to take the young people along a pathway of learning.

The project has helped to dispel some myths and to overcome stereotypes, and allowed young people to talk effectively with people from other faiths.

The adults on the steering group from different faith backgrounds have learnt that all faiths can find it difficult to work with young people sometimes and that young people are all going through the same things.

Overcoming barriers

It took time for the young people to get to know one another and to get on. The project volunteers understood that this would be the case and made sure that there was time in the project for relationship building, as well as building young people's confidence and trust.

Sometimes it was difficult to arrange the activities to fit in with different faith calendars, which the project volunteers knew was important in order to be inclusive. Sunday afternoons were the most suitable time of the week for people of all faiths involved.

Some young people had difficulty travelling to activities. If no relatives were available to bring them, the project paid for a minibus or taxis.

Key success factors

- The team's positive attitude.
- Early meetings with local faith leaders to explain the project and its goals helped overcome concerns about proselytism.
- Mixing the core activities with fun, social activities helped to maintain young people's interest and motivation.
- Taking the time to build trust among the young people.
- The commitment of the steering group and the volunteers.

With hindsight

The project has been very time consuming for the volunteers, many of whom already lead busy lives. If the organisation did this again, they would look for more funding to pay for a dedicated worker.

How Faiths in Action funding helped make the project more effective

The project would not have happened without the funding. The money was important for improving the quality of activities, in particular making it possible to offer hospitality, which is an important element of many faiths.

When the project funding finishes

The organisation is looking to develop some of the ideas that have emerged out of this project, and will seek funding from appropriate grant programmes.

‘The most significant thing about this project has been ...’

‘... watching the young people’s journey of growing their understanding and respect for one another’s faiths and cultures.’

‘Through working on this project, the most important thing I’ve learnt about inter faith working is ...’

‘... the need for further religious literacy, as it’s impossible to understand people without understanding what they believe in ... also, that sometimes you can’t separate faith and culture.’

If you were to give one piece of advice to local, regional or national policymakers about the sort of work you’ve been doing, what would it be?

Give funding in a way that allows grassroots groups to deliver inter faith work and make connections between faith communities.

Organisation: Across Communities

Contact details

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Grant value: £12,000 over one year

Staff resource: All volunteers

Organisation
Smethwick Youth and Community Centre
Project name
Inter Faith Youth Forum

Project purpose

The organisation was already working with young people from a range of backgrounds prior to the project. Staff and local people thought it important to discuss faith because there were some difficult issues between different communities that were not being resolved.

Staff wanted to make a positive impact on the whole community through changing young people's attitudes and increasing their understanding about other faiths.

Project activities

The project delivers a programme in Smethwick in Birmingham over 12 weeks with groups of 15 to 20 young people aged 16–18. There is a paid part-time co-ordinator who is supported by volunteers.

The staff developed a framework for the programme, including group discussions, presentations, videos and visits to local places of worship. Each of the 12 sessions has its own theme:

1. Introduction to the programme.
2. Beliefs on creation.
3. and 4. Introduction to Abrahamic faiths (Christianity, Judaism, Islam).
5. and 6. Introduction to Dharmic faiths (Hinduism, Sikhism, Buddhism).
7. Euthanasia.
8. Community issues between different faith groups.
9. Committing to a faith.

10. Faith schools.
11. Afterlife.
12. Closure and evaluation.

Each session is practical and has different activities, and offers young people the chance to think deeply and discuss the various issues. The young people are encouraged to get actively involved and to take responsibility, by for example preparing posters or giving presentations about a particular topic. The groups have visited local places of worship – a mosque, a church and a gurdwara – where they have been able to do a tour, listen to a talk from someone from that community and have the chance to ask questions. To date, two group programmes have been completed and a third is underway.

There is also a drop-in service for members.

Outcomes

Inter faith activity and relationship outcomes

Seeing similarities between faiths

Several of the young people have been surprised to discover similarities and commonalities between faiths, for example that some of the prophets are the same people.

More understanding

The young people have gained more understanding about what other people believe, so that they can dig beneath the 'headlines'.

Breaking down barriers

Within the wider community, it seems that some tensions that existed at the start of the project are decreasing, based on the growing relationships and understanding arising out of the project.

Face to Face and Side by Side building block outcomes

Developing the skills to bridge and link

Some of the young people have adopted more mature behaviour and changed their attitudes as they have progressed through the programme, becoming more involved in the group's discussions.

The young people have improved their presentation and listening skills, as a result of delivering some of the activities themselves.

Structures and processes that support dialogue and social action

The focus for the project is to encourage dialogue, and to change behaviours in the wider community. The young people's involvement with the programme is finite, but they have other opportunities through the Centre to be active in the community.

The project has enabled young people and adults to have constructive discussions about potentially difficult subjects such as terrorism and Islamophobia, reflecting the kinds of conversations that the young people may be having at home.

Opportunities for learning which build understanding

The Faiths in Action funding for computers has added an important dimension to the way that the young people can learn, as many of them may not have access to the internet at home. For example, during the sessions, they have searched the web for information and watched YouTube videos, which have been effective ways of learning.

Other outcomes

- The Centre has begun to develop stronger links with a local mosque's youth group, and the mosque is now actively supporting the project.
- The Centre's staff have noticed that some of the young people who took part in the project are now coming to some of their other activities, such as yoga classes. The project manager thinks that they are becoming more interested in the Centre because the Centre has shown an interest in them.
- A couple of participants have expressed interest in volunteering at the Centre, particularly helping with activities for younger children.

Overcoming barriers

Overall the project has gone well, but the project manager noted a couple of issues that had arisen.

The Centre youth workers found that it was difficult at the start to recruit volunteers to help with the project. However, as people have found out about the project, more volunteers are getting involved.

On the first programme, the young people did not all fill in registration forms and records were not kept as efficiently as they might have been. The youth workers now take responsibility for this.

Key success factors

- The scheme of activities has been very important because it gives a framework for the programme; within this, it is possible to prioritise certain things or make adaptations, but without losing overall flow and direction.
- The system that is now in place requires young people to register at each session they attend. The most regular attendees get priority when Centre trips are being organised so this acts as an incentive.
- Having the materials and equipment they need to deliver all the different aspects of the programme, in particular the computers that the young people use in almost all the sessions.
- Having paid staff, who are able to take full responsibility for the various tasks that need to be done.

With hindsight

The project manager notes how important it is to assert authority at the beginning of each course, so that the young people know they can't mess about, and to maintain this authority through the course of the programme.

How Faiths in Action funding helped make the project more effective

Without this funding, the project would not have happened. It has been vital to pay for the youth workers' time and for materials.

Also, the *Better Places, Better Planet* guide (Church, 2008) from CDF helped with the planning of the project.

When the project funding finishes

The Centre hope to apply for more funding, now that the overall structure for the work is established, and are considering extending the project to different age groups.

‘The most significant thing about this project has been ...’

‘... the understanding that the young people have got by the time they leave, compared to the perspectives when they come into the project ... subtle changes make a world of difference.’

‘Through working on this project, the most important thing I’ve learnt about inter faith working is ...’

‘... knowing what you’re talking about and researching it properly ... get to know what’s sensitive, what people will and won’t want to talk about.’

Organisation: Smethwick Youth and Community Centre

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Grant value: £12,000 over two years

Staff resource: Part-time youth workers

Organisation

Oxygen

Project name

Sacred Space Kingston

Project purpose

The project uses performance and visual arts to engage young people and community groups in thinking about spiritual values. Participants use their work to show a wider audience in the local area of Kingston, Surrey what values they find important. The project aims to enable members of different faith communities to connect, work together and respect their differences. The art is a way of showing how creativity can contribute to community.

Project activities

There are three main components over the course of this two-year project: art-based sessions for local young people at after-school and youth clubs, a concert and an exhibition.

Working with after-school clubs and youth groups for young people aged 11–17, the project officer runs a cycle of three sessions with each group on a particular theme. So far, three series of art workshops have been held. In the first secondary school after-school club, the three sessions covered ‘What makes us happy, what makes us unhappy, and how others feel and how we can treat them in the ways that we would like to be treated.’ At another secondary school, the sessions focused on spirituality and turning over a new leaf, looking positively at the experience of moving up to secondary school. The third series was held on a housing estate with girls aged 15 and over, focused on dreams and aspirations, and how these could be thought of in spiritual terms.

The second component was a concert held as part of the local Inter Faith Week celebrations, planned and delivered with the local Inter Faith Forum. The programme included dance, music and presentations. The performers were mostly young people from the local area, including Sikh musicians, Hindu dancers, Orthodox

Jewish singers and a community choir led by a humanist. Also, a young female Christian singer and a young male Muslim rapper jointly performed a song they had composed especially for the event. One element of the concert was a presentation by young people about a charity, Malaria No More, explaining its work and how local people could help. Somewhere between 70 and 100 friends and family members came to the concert.

The third component, an art exhibition, is to be held in July 2010. It will showcase the variety of artwork produced through the workshops. It is intended to be an opportunity for the young people to bring along their families and friends, and to talk about the importance of spiritual things in everyday life.

Outcomes

Inter faith activity and relationship outcomes

Collaboration between people of different faiths

People of different faith backgrounds worked together to plan the concert. The project officer was pleased that collaboration happened at several different levels, including between faith leaders, between community members and in particular, between young people.

Demonstrating inter faith working

The activities are beginning to demonstrate to a wider local audience that people of different faiths can work together.

Face to Face and Side by Side building block outcomes

Developing the skills to bridge and link

While preparing for the concert, participants built bridges and links between different people with different roles and in different communities.

Structures and processes that support dialogue and social action

Using art and creativity was an important and carefully chosen way to stimulate and give structure to discussion about spirituality. It succeeded in enabling people to have ‘amazing conversations’ where they felt comfortable to talk openly with one another.

Including the presentation about the Malaria No More charity in the concert helped members of the audience to think about how they were part of a much wider community and how they could make a difference to it.

Opportunities for learning which build understanding

Working together to prepare for the concert enabled people to understand a bit more about ‘where others are coming from’ and to see what they have in common.

Other outcomes

The project’s activities have given people a space to be creative, and a chance to express themselves and their spirituality through art.

Overcoming barriers

It has been quite difficult to explain how art, creativity and faith can work together. However, once faith leaders and others saw the project in action, they understood the connections.

Oxygen is a Christian organisation, and some people may have been concerned that the project could have been directed along Christian lines. However, the project manager was careful to demonstrate by the way that she worked that this was not the case and that the outcome of the work is directed by the participants themselves. Over time, it has been possible to build up trust with partners and faith leaders so that they understand the project’s inter faith aims.

On a practical note, the project manager notes that people of faith tend to be very busy with commitments in their own community, so it is important not to overload volunteers and to try to work with several different people.

Key success factors

- The project was new and sometimes plans lacked detail. It was important that people were willing to take a risk and so gave project staff and volunteers the chance to experiment with a new idea.

- Having funding was crucial. Although the project staff could use churches for free, they were keen to use more neutral venues. Funding allowed them to cover the costs of hiring a new space. The grant also meant they had the staff time needed to prepare and deliver the project's work.
- Listening to people and being willing to adapt was also important.

With hindsight

Ideally, the project staff and volunteers would have had more time to prepare for the concert. The steering group needed to wait until September to begin to work on it, as the summer period is always very busy for everyone, but the concert was planned for November in order to fall during Inter Faith Week.

How Faiths in Action funding helped make the project more effective

The funding enabled the organisation to make the project manager a paid role, allowing her to devote more time than she could as a volunteer. This has meant that she could build up more relationships and work with a wider group, as well as enable them to get more deeply involved. She hopes that this will lead to wider ownership of the project, as well as reaching out to people who might not usually have a voice or have the chance to express themselves creatively.

When the project funding finishes

The project manager hopes to be able to continue this work, if more funding can be found through grants or personal supporters.

‘The most significant thing about this project has been ...’
‘... how creativity has enabled people to open up about their faith, and what’s important to them if they have no specified belief systems.’

‘Through working on this project, the most important thing I’ve learnt about inter faith working is ...’
‘... while we express our faiths in different ways, we care about the same things.’

If you were to give one piece of advice to local, regional or national policymakers about the sort of work you've been doing, what would it be?

When working with children and young people, make sure that the legislation and health and safety requirements allow for self-expression to be maintained.

Organisation: Oxygen

Contact details

Name: Andrea Campanale

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Grant value: £11,880 over two years

Staff resource: One part-time staff member

Organisation

St John's Wood Adventure Playground

Project name

Have Some Faith in Play

Project purpose

The project aims to introduce faith as part of the play environment, contributing to children's understanding of other faiths and cultures, and giving them an insight into the diversity of their neighbourhood (St John's Wood, London). The ethos behind the project is all about encouraging children to be able to enquire about faith, something which is not always encouraged.

Project activities

The main element of the project is three or four visits to local faith centres each year, over the two years of the project. Within walking distance of the playground are three synagogues, three churches and one mosque, with two Hindu temples a short underground ride away. The children are aged 5 to 13, and up to 25 children participate in each visit. The faith centre's leader hosts the visit because project staff think it is very important for children to talk directly to the faith leader. The visits include hands-on activity, like trying on clothes associated with different faiths (such as saris, chasubles and talliths), blowing a conch or shofar, or trying yoga and meditation.

Project staff support the visits with on-site activities at the playground afterwards. These include arts and crafts such as clay modelling, sand art and calligraphy, as well as inter faith quizzes.

At the end of each summer there is a party at the playground, to which all the faith leaders are invited.

Outcomes

Inter faith activity and relationship outcomes

New experiences

The visits are a completely new experience for many of the

children, opening up new opportunities for enquiry for them. Children have the opportunity to meet people that they may have never met otherwise. As one Afghan boy commented, 'This is the first time I've been in a synagogue and met a rabbi ... I've really learnt something about a religion I didn't know before.' The visits can also be a new experience for the faith leaders, who may not have hosted such diverse groups before.

Opportunities for informal inter faith working

The faith leaders who host the visits are all invited to the playground's end-of-summer celebration. The leaders have been able to meet and chat more informally, in a completely different setting from where they might usually meet, such as an inter faith forum.

Face to Face and Side by Side building block outcomes

Opportunities for learning which build understanding

The whole project is focused on giving children a chance to learn about different faiths in their neighbourhood through discussion and social action. The way that the visits are set up and facilitated is designed to promote active learning, with children encouraged to ask questions and try new things.

Other outcomes

The project staff hope that the experiences remain as enduring memories for the children and remove any impediment to further enquiry and learning. In the spirit of the 'Every Child Matters' agenda,^{*} the project is designed to offer the children an experience for both enjoyment and achievement.

Overcoming barriers

The project has gone very smoothly, which the project manager attributes to the fact that this work builds on what the organisation already does, so they are very familiar with the kinds of problems that can arise.

* Every Child Matters is the Government framework for improving the delivery of services for children, young people and families.

Key success factors

- Everyone has bought into the project, which has made it easy to deliver.
- The organisation has plenty of experience in delivering similar sorts of activities.

With hindsight

The project manager is happy with the way things have worked, but notes that it might be good to extend the number of faiths that are included, for example by visiting a Sikh gurdwara.

How Faiths in Action funding helped make the project more effective

If the project had not been funded, the Adventure Playground would not have been able to deliver these activities. It was crucial to have enough staff to make the project happen, including for planning the activities and having the necessary number of adult chaperones to meet regulations.

When the project funding finishes

The Adventure Playground will seek more funding to continue this work, in order to be able to offer the same opportunities to a new generation of children. For the children who have taken part so far, the staff hope that the experiences will be remembered.

‘The most significant thing about this project has been ...’
‘... to see how the children encounter something they might never have thought was possible and to be so warmly welcomed.’

‘Through working on this project, the most important thing I’ve learnt about inter faith working is ...’
‘... that it’s long term ... there’s a lot of potential in the wisdom and values that different people can contribute, and what they can do when working together.’

If you were to give one piece of advice to local, regional or national policymakers about the sort of work you’ve been doing, what would it be?

Faith communities coming together can be one of the most effective means of facilitating integration and cohesion; this requires, and merits, long-term consistent investment.

Organisation: St John's Wood Adventure Playground

Contact details

Name: Steven Derby

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Grant value: £11,892 over two years

Staff resource: One part-time coordinator and youth workers, volunteers

Organisation
Burnley Youth Theatre

Project name
The Arrow Art Project

Project purpose

The project aimed to bring two groups of young people together to create a sculpture that will represent all the faiths in Burnley. The completed artwork will be placed in the theatre's grounds, which are open to the public.

Two groups of young people came together on this project as a result of the existing working relationships between staff members from Burnley Youth Theatre's Arrow Group and the Basement Project in central Burnley. The Arrow Group is part of an international initiative – Art as a Resource for Reconciliation Over the World. The Basement Project is an organisation working with young people classed as NEET, that is, not in employment, education or training.

The staff discussed possible areas of joint interest, and this project was the result.

Project activities

The first step was to recruit young people to take part. The project manager initiated this via youth workers with whom she had a relationship, asking them to refer young people who would be interested in and become committed to the project. The Basement Project was also able to draw young people from those who were already registered with them.

Over the summer holidays in 2009, the project manager and a local community sculptor held eight sessions with the young people, each one up to four or five hours. This gave a long enough time for people to get into the work, but also enabled them to fit it around other commitments. There was a maximum of 15 young people at a session, about half and half Muslim and Christian.

Each session was led by the sculptor. The sessions followed a series of steps:

- *Researching different faiths* – starting with informal discussions, the young people talked about their own faiths and those of their friends, and thought about how they saw faith in their lives. They also did some research, for example about symbols associated with particular faiths. There were laptops available so that the young people could do research over the internet, as well as ask questions. This element of the project also involved informal presentations from people of faith, including a youth pastor from the Basement Project and a youth worker talking about his experience as a Muslim.
- *Building up artistic skills* – starting with the basics, such as pencil drawing, working with charcoal and clay modelling, the young people learnt how to express themselves in ways other than talking.
- *Thinking about the sculpture and what it should represent* – the young people began with thinking about Burnley and Nelson (the two areas where they lived) in terms of the good things about the places, what they wanted to say about these places and who they needed to represent. The faiths they suggested included Islam, Hinduism, Judaism, Christianity (Catholic and Church of England), and Jedi Knights. To help with their thinking, they used a variety of media – talking, putting ideas on paper, using clay, building cardboard models – so that over several weeks, they moved from paper to three dimensions.
- *Developing the final idea* – the sculpture will be a metal tree, with a different religious symbol hanging from each branch. The idea is that it should be part of the woodland in the Youth Theatre's grounds, in an area which is visible for visitors to appreciate it but not too open where it might be susceptible to vandalism.

The sculptor is now working with local metalworkers to create the full sculpture. The project manager hopes that the opening celebration will be held in Spring 2010, with the young people and their families taking part.

Outcomes

Inter faith activity and relationship outcomes

Working together

Over a number of weeks, the young people moved from working as two separate groups (Christians and Muslims) to working together. They overcame their suspicions as they talked and got to know one another.

Increased understanding

The young people's understanding about faiths grew – their own and others. For example, at one session held during Eid, there were no Muslims. The project manager explained why, and then at the following session, there was an open discussion amongst the young people about Eid. Also, the young people have come to recognise the similarities between themselves as people, regardless of their faith.

Face to Face and Side by Side building block outcomes

Developing the skills to bridge and link

The young people have become more confident to express themselves, both generally and in relation to faith. At the same time, their communication skills have improved.

Shared spaces for interaction and social action

The project provided a neutral and safe space for young Christians and Muslims to meet. The Youth Theatre site is 'off the beaten track, away from local territories'.

Structures and processes that support dialogue and social action

The project followed a developmental flowing process that opened up debate between faiths and about faith. There has been a defined ending, but the sculpture will remain as a symbol for a wider community. The project manager hopes that visitors to the Youth Theatre in future will find the sculpture a catalyst for discussion.

Other outcomes

The sculpture will add to the resources offered by the Youth Theatre.

Overcoming barriers

At first, attendance was an issue. However, support from the youth workers to encourage young people to attend made a big difference, as did providing transport to the sessions and incentives once the young people were there, such as refreshments.

Occasionally, there were small problems with some of the young people's behaviour. The project manager, the youth workers and the sculptor all had experience of dealing with this sort of thing, and they found that 'the odd stern word' was sufficient.

Key success factors

- The support from the Basement Project's youth worker was very important, because he knew many of the young people well and could help to find out why someone was not engaging.
- The persistence with which the artist pushed the young people to work together, which was a key factor in helping them to break down barriers and understand their similarities.
- The sculptor gave the young people ownership of the project through getting them involved in planning the sessions, for example thinking about how they could do the work, what sort of materials they might want to use, what sort of preparation work they wanted her to do before the next session. This led to a real sense of trust between the young people and the sculptor.

How Faiths in Action funding helped make the project more effective

The project would not have happened without the Faiths in Action funding. In particular, it has given the organisations and the participants freedom to discuss faith 'which is really important in Burnley', where they might not otherwise have had the opportunity to do so.

When the project funding finishes

This has been a discrete project. The project manager hopes to use the sculpture as a stimulus for the Youth Theatre's work in future,

such as inspiring a dance piece or a drama, although this would require further funding.

‘The most significant thing about this project has been ...’

‘... the relationships that were built between young people of different faiths and the eventual understanding and appreciation of other people’s faiths.’

‘Through working on this project, the most important thing I’ve learnt about inter faith working is ...’

‘... the value of giving young people a forum to discuss faith openly, to break down the barriers that might prevent them from talking and asking questions.’

If you were to give advice to local, regional or national policy makers about the sort of work you’ve been doing, what would it be?

This sort of work is worthwhile and funding should remain available for it. These sorts of grants should be publicised more widely so that youth and arts-based organisations know what’s there.

Organisation: Burnley Youth Theatre

Contact details

Name: Karen Barnes

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Grant value: £9,865 over one year

Staff resource: One part-time project manager, a contracted sculptor, support from partner organisation’s youth worker

Organisation

Leeds Jewish Representative Council

Project name

Leeds Inter Faith Cricket Project

Project purpose

The project aims to use cricket to get young people (aged 8–16) from different backgrounds to mix with one another, so that it is possible to break down any preconceptions or misunderstandings.

Project activities

Over two years, the funding from Faiths in Action is being used to fund six cricket events, the development of the project's management committee and a young people's Leadership Group.

The cricket events are a mixture of full-day and afternoon events, where young people of different faiths aged 8 to 16 come together for a mix of coaching and competition in mixed faith teams. During the lunch break, each team takes part in a discussion about team working. The project is in its early stages; the four events held so far have attracted between 30 and 60 young people from Jewish, Muslim, Sikh and Christian backgrounds. As the project develops, it is hoped that young people from the Hindu community will also get involved.

The management committee is intended to represent the various interests and faiths involved in the project, with active members currently including members of the Jewish and Muslim communities, a representative from the Black and Ethnic Minorities Forum of the Yorkshire Cricket Board, and a representative from the Caribbean Cricket Club. As the project progresses, the committee is working actively to expand to include Sikh and Hindu members, by meeting and building relationships with people from organisations that may be interested in the project.

A fundamental part of the project's development is the creation of a young people's Leadership Group, which will help to organise a

major cricket event to be held in June 2010. A group of around 12 young people of different faiths (aged 14–16) is being formed. Group members will do two training courses: the first is a general leadership course which will help them to reflect on identity and the nature of inter faith working; the second is the England Cricket Board's Cricket Leadership course. The adult management committee members are doing the general leadership training course as well, so that they feel comfortable to support the young people effectively.

Outcomes

Inter faith activity and relationship outcomes

Young people meeting people of different faiths

Young people of different faiths are mixing and talking to one another at the cricket events.

Getting to know one another

The management committee members are getting to know people of other faiths and backgrounds in a way they have never done before, even though they may have already met people of different faiths. Friendships are beginning to grow, based on considerable personal learning.

Tackling preconceptions

Meeting people of a different faith, spending time together, working and playing together, has helped all the participants (adult and youth) dispel misconceptions about people from other faiths.

Face to Face and Side by Side building block outcomes

Developing the skills to bridge and link

The leadership course is intended to build the management committee and the young people's Leadership Group's skills to work together across faiths, in particular through helping them to understand the nature of faith work and teamwork.

Structures and processes which support dialogue and social action

The cricket events are all about social interaction – young people from different backgrounds and places in Leeds meeting one

another and mixing together around a common interest. The management committee hopes that the structures set up through this project will be able to be continued and extended, if further funding can be found.

Opportunities for learning which build understanding

The short lunchtime sessions at the cricket events are giving young people the opportunity to talk about teamwork and how to work with different people.

Management committee members have found that by simply working together to make the project happen, they have learnt about other members' backgrounds.

Other outcomes

More young people are playing cricket.

Overcoming barriers

So far, there has not been as much involvement as the management committee would want from some faith groups in Leeds. Until recently, the volunteers and the voluntary project manager did not have the time they needed to develop these relationships. Emailing meeting invitations and minutes was not enough. However, with Faiths in Action funding paying for a part-time project manager, meetings have now been scheduled and the project will be investing time in relationship building. They hope that this will enable them to increase involvement from Hindu, Sikh and white Christian organisations, as well as other Jewish groups.

Key success factors

- A strong personal relationship between the representatives from the Leeds Jewish Representative Council and the Yorkshire Cricket Board's Black and Ethnic Minority Forum, which has brought energy to the project. Also, their differences in appearance (one is white, the other black) have helped to demonstrate visibly how people with differences are working together.
- The project cannot operate with only voluntary support, as the events need money (to pay for venue hire for example).

The funding, originally from O2 and now from Faiths in Action, has been crucial.

- In Leeds, there is real support for inter faith work, so the project has received help from a variety of voluntary and public sector organisations.

With hindsight

At this stage, things are running well, ‘working far better than we ever thought it would.’ However, the project’s management committee members are reflecting on how to work in future, and hope to collaborate with someone from Leeds Metropolitan University on evaluating and monitoring the project.

How Faiths in Action funding helped make the project more effective

The real contribution has been the funding for a part-time worker, without whom the project was struggling to react to enquiries or find the time to develop relationships.

When the project funding finishes

The project has funding from Faiths in Action for 15 months, after which they will seek further funding from trusts and foundations, or other grant sources. Importantly, they will be focusing on building relationships, which will then help them to define the project’s future direction and may open up doors for further funding.

‘The most significant thing about this project has been ...’

‘... seeing relationships develop between people of different faiths, especially so far those within the management committee.’

‘Through working on this project, the most important thing I’ve learnt about inter faith working is ...’

‘... that it all spins out from personal relationships.’

If you were to give one piece of advice to local, regional or national policymakers about the sort of work you've been doing, what would it be?

Continue to provide funding in the way that Faiths in Action has. Writing the application form and evaluating the project can be a bit of a burden, but as it forces you to think about what you want to do and explain it, it is very helpful.

Organisation: Leeds Jewish Representative Council

Contact detail:

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Grant value: £11,750 over two years

Staff resource: Initially voluntary, now 12 hours paid per week



Chapter Six

Faith-based social action

Introduction

In this theme, the following case studies are presented:

Broxtowe Community Celebration

A series of fun events held to celebrate the diversity of Broxtowe, bringing people from a range of faiths and backgrounds together (page 110).

The Multi-Faith Centre, Derby

A training programme for students to learn about diversity and increase understanding about faith issues, and support for the students to take action on an issue important to them (page 116).

Chiltern Racial Equality Council

Bringing people across Chesham together through the preparation and delivery of a number of activities to celebrate One World Week (page 121).

Churches' Council for Industry and Social Responsibility (ISR)

Extending the existing major emergency planning project to be able to offer a multi-faith chaplaincy, including building a network of faith organisations for the project and recruiting and training volunteer chaplains (page 127).

A few key messages

- An effective way to take social action is to bring people in a neighbourhood or town together around an event. Making the event something people want to come to and making it fun are important. The learning is informal, but no less effective for that. A successful approach is to put on activities which give time for conversation, or which provide some sort of catalyst for people to talk to one another, such as art or craft activities, or sharing a meal. Broxtowe Community Celebration Group and Chiltern Racial Equality Council each held a series of different sorts of events which raised people's awareness about faith and culture in their community.
- Individuals and groups may need to improve their skills and confidence to feel that they can become active in their communities. Both ISR and the Multi-Faith Centre's projects were designed to equip individuals with the skills to take action. However, to get to this stage, quite a bit of preparation is required, including creating interest in and commitment to the project, as well as training for the participants.
- Being pro-active in bringing a faith dimension to wider communities pays dividends. 'Showing by doing' is very effective. Participants in the projects described here are demonstrating through their actions how faith communities and people of faith can make a difference to the places they live in. The motivation may be a belief stemming from their faith that they should be working to make a difference for other people in some way, or it may be to add value to work in their community.

Organisation

Broxtowe Community Celebration Group

Project name

Broxtowe Community Celebration

Project purpose

The aim of the project is to celebrate the diversity of Broxtowe, Nottinghamshire, bringing people from a range of faiths and backgrounds together. It is intended as a chance to hear something new and to learn about other people.

Project activities

There are three main elements to the project:

- Supporting and working with the project volunteers to create more opportunities for them to talk and learn together.
- Two ‘seasonal celebrations’ – one a spring event after school in a local primary school and the other a winter ‘Seasons of Light’ event in the community hall.
- A large community celebration.

This is not a new project. The organisation’s steering group, made up of local community members and representatives of local service provider organisations, identified a need to create more opportunity for the project’s volunteers to talk to and learn from one another. So as well as continuing the structured time volunteers spend together planning events, the project now includes informal time, for example having lunch together.

The spring seasonal celebration involved people from a range of faiths and cultures – Christian, Muslim, Jewish, Sikh and Japanese. Held after school at a local primary school, various activities were on offer for children and their families. The activities focused on festivals falling in springtime, such as the Japanese Children’s Festival, Easter and Passover. Sikh craft, Hindu Holi paint throwing (outdoors!), Muslim ‘mendhis’ or

henna designs, as well as performances and different foods were all available for the children and their families to enjoy.

The winter 'Seasons of Light' festival was held at the community hall on the day that the local council officially switched on the Christmas lights. As before, the event offered several activities related to different faiths and cultures. For the first time the local Korean church took part, showing a variety of Korean Christian artefacts. There was also other Christian activity focused on Advent and Christingle, 'rangoli' activity to create a picture from natural materials such as seeds and lentils (with its origins in Hinduism and Nepal), Chinese lantern making, and Jewish 'dreidl' making (a traditional children's game associated with Chanukah).

The biggest event was the summer community celebration held in July 2009, where the project took over a primary school for the day. Around 1,400 people came, enjoying many different activities. Craft and drama workshops and performances, 'kwik cricket' and five-a-side football tournaments, stands from local service provider organisations, well-dressing and a facilitated exercise to show people's links to others on a world map were all offered. A highlight of the day was the free communal lunch with many different foods to taste.

At each of the events, the activities were devised to show some aspect of different faiths and cultures and to give participants the chance to talk to people of different faith and cultural backgrounds. There is plenty of time to chat, for example, with a Muslim teenager while she is completing a henna design on your hand, or talk to your neighbour at the lunch table.

The big community celebration will be held again in the second year of the project. The 'Seasons of Light' event will be held in the same venue to build on the success of the first year. The spring seasonal celebration will be held at a new venue in the north of Broxtowe where the group has not worked before.

Outcomes

Inter faith activity and relationship outcomes

Appreciating diversity in the local community

The different activities have proven to be positive ways to

demonstrate and explain interests which are specific to particular communities, and through this to generate pride in one's background.

Increasing understanding

The volunteers helping to organise and run events, and the people attending have had a chance to share their experience and knowledge of different faiths and cultures and to learn from others. Traditional English celebrations were offered, such as the well-dressing which is associated with neighbouring Derbyshire, as well as traditions from further afield.

Creating visibility

The events have helped to make inter faith dialogue and activity very visible in the area.

Face to Face and Side by Side building block outcomes

Developing the skills to bridge and link

The volunteers' confidence has grown, and they are increasingly comfortable explaining their faith backgrounds and learning about those of others. This has been a 'natural process', and is so important that the steering group is discussing more formal training with the local volunteering centre.

Shared spaces for interaction and social action

The events have acted as a community space by bringing people together in a way that would not otherwise happen.

Structures and processes which support dialogue and social action

The steering group has forged links with local decision-making bodies. There is a growing relationship with the Local Strategic Partnership, where volunteers are now representing their faith group. A local black and minority ethnic health group is being started as a result of the project's linking work.

Opportunities for learning which build understanding

This is the key aim of the project. The project activities aim to provide opportunities for people of all ages to talk to one another and to learn from one another.

Other outcomes

- Some young people have become more aware of what they can offer and have been getting involved in other activities for young people. For example, through relationships made with the local Youth Service's youth workers during this project, one young person has now joined the local Youth Council.
- Local service providers have improved their relationships with faith-based communities. For example, ten people signed up to the local LINK (Local Involvement Network to improve health and social care) at the 'Seasons of Light' event.

Overcoming barriers

Organising each event is very time-consuming. So that volunteers do not have to shoulder too much of the burden, members of the steering group attached to local service provider organisations take on quite a bit of the administration.

Providing food at the community celebration 'has been a victim of its own success', in that many volunteers are needed to meet demand. The project is exploring various options to deal with this, including making a small charge.

There is a danger that some people feel excluded because of perceptions they may have about faith. The steering group present activities as being multi-cultural and explain that participants don't have to come from a particular faith to take part.

Key success factors

- Keeping it fun.
- Having a shared purpose and understanding.
- Taking the time to get to know one another and build up trust.
- The steering group members who were representatives of local service provider organisations providing support for the volunteers.

With hindsight

The steering group's reflections on the first year's activities have helped them to think about how to plan for the second year's activities. As mentioned above, they will be reviewing the food

element of the big community celebration. They will also try to put on more of the activities that get people talking together, such as the facilitated activity to mark people's connections on a world map. Underlying everything will be a commitment to keeping the project fresh, with new activities to attract people and retain their involvement.

How Faiths in Action funding helped make the project more effective

The size of the grant meant that the steering group members did not have to spend a lot of time on fundraising meetings with different organisations. In particular, this freed up time for the members of the steering group who were representatives of local service provider organisations to support the volunteer members. It had another benefit, providing the 'comfort factor' of knowing that the cost of the big community celebration was underwritten.

The length of the funding – two years – has given the group time to plan ahead.

When the project funding finishes

The steering group is trying to keep the profile of the events and the organisation high with the Local Strategic Partnership and other local organisations. Hopefully, this will support the steering group's attempts to seek other organisations' contributions and sponsorship.

It may prove necessary to charge people for some of the activities, although the group is keen to keep the event accessible.

'The most significant thing about this project has been ...'

'... seeing people talking to one another ... giving people chances to see the similarities ... a sense of pride in people really learning something.'

'Through working on this project, the most important thing I've learnt about inter faith working is ...'

'... starting with what people have in common, because then people build up confidence to talk about differences.'

If you were to give one piece of advice to local, regional or national policy makers about the sort of work you've been doing, what would it be?

Think quite broadly. Community cohesion should be seen as core work for local organisations, even in the current financial climate.

Organisation: Broxtowe Community Celebration Group

Contact details

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Grant value: £11,105 over two years

Staff resource: Volunteers plus support from organisation-hosted steering group members

Organisation

The Multi-Faith Centre, Derby

Project name

Religious diversity and anti-discrimination training

Project purpose

The Multi-Faith Centre is based on the campus of the University of Derby. It also has a remit to work with the wider community. In undertaking this project, the organisation wanted to connect with the University's student body, and to open up people's thinking. The project aims to provide an opportunity for students to learn about diversity and to increase their understanding about faith issues – in particular, about how faith relates to everyday life and the equalities agenda. The project also aims to help people to understand and value difference.

Project activities

The project is part of a European-wide programme, through which a training programme had already been developed. The training is delivered over two full days to a group of about 15 students.

Through the two years of this project, there will be one training programme per semester – that is, three per year. To date, the project has delivered one training programme and is part way through the second. The first training programme was attended by students from a mixture of backgrounds including Christian, Hindu, Muslim, Sikh and Pagan.

The two-day programme consists of a distinct set of sessions.

The first day runs as follows:

- *Building the foundations*: allowing the participants to get to know one another through ice-breaker exercises, and to look at their hopes and fears for the training. This is also an opportunity to establish ground rules for working together.

- *Identity*: the students are guided to talk about their first experience and understanding of the notion of God, and where they are now on that journey.
- *Cultural awareness*: the students carry out an exercise to plot a matrix of faiths over time, adding a whole variety of other information, such as the year of origin, the name of the founder, prophet or leader, the name of a well-known place associated with that faith, and a symbol of that faith.
- *Questions of interpretation*: using the technique of a ‘silent discussion’ (where participants cannot talk to one another but can write comments and thoughts on sheets of paper spread out on the floor), the students are asked to explore a contentious issue – for example, the hijab or veil. Working in this way encourages more in-depth thinking and frees people up to ask questions that they might be hesitant about raising verbally.

The second day begins with a reflection of the first day, then goes on to include:

- *Examining the issues*: the students are asked to consider where they stand on a variety of questions – for example, ‘I believe the scripture I know best is mostly story telling or mythology’ or ‘It is entirely possible to develop and live by a good moral code without religion’ – and to position themselves on a continuum going from ‘I strongly agree’ to ‘I strongly disagree’.
- *Walk in my shoes*: this focuses on exploring people’s perceptions of positive and negative attitudes towards identity. The students are split into three groups – believers, non-believers and journeyers – and are asked to think about the positive and negative aspects of the other groups’ identities. This exercise aims to help the participants think about stereotypes, discrimination and their own ways of thinking.
- *Confronting the issues*: the students look at the role of the media through studying particular faith-related media stories. The exercise involves considering how the people in these stories are portrayed – as victims, perpetrators, confronters or bystanders. This helps the students to think carefully about why the media portray people in the way they do.

- *Social action*: for those who are interested in following up the training, this session aims to suggest some useful tools and techniques, such as solution focused questions.

Outcomes

Inter faith activity and relationship outcomes

Changing perceptions

The students have increased their awareness and understanding of other faiths – for example, they know more about the rituals of different faiths. As the project manager put it, ‘The project has opened up their faith landscape.’

Interacting with people from other faiths

The project has brought together young people from different faiths and has given them the opportunity to spend time together and a structure for beginning to talk to each other. It has enabled them to ‘cut across the silos of university friendships’.

Face to Face and Side by Side building block outcomes

Developing the skills to bridge and link

Students have overcome their fears about potentially offending someone of another faith, and have become more confident to talk to people of other faiths. For example, one non-Muslim participant talked to a Muslim about head coverings and said afterwards, ‘I would never have done that before.’

Thinking deeply about their own experiences has enabled the students to consider why they think the way they do, and in some cases, to overcome stereotypical views.

Shared spaces for interaction and social action

The training sessions have provided a safe space where the students feel free to interact in a way that they might not otherwise be able to do.

Structures and processes which support dialogue and social action

Achieving dialogue is a vital part of this project’s aims. In addition, the project gives people the chance to move on to social action, and in some cases to recognise how what they are already doing is contributing to social action issues.

Because of their involvement in this, a few students have gone on to new activities, such as volunteering at a local community centre.

Opportunities for learning which build understanding

As the project manager says, ‘Opportunities for learning which build understanding – this is the programme in a nutshell.’

Overcoming barriers

Overall, the project manager feels that things have been going well. However, the Centre has found it hard to recruit young people because the training requires considerable commitment. The Student Union has been supportive, as has the volunteering programme of the University’s Careers Centre; both organisations have worked hard with the Multi-Faith Centre to market the training.

The training can raise difficult issues, and sometimes people can feel uncomfortable about learning based on experience. The trainers are sensitive towards this, and try to allow the participants space to commit themselves to taking part in a way that is comfortable to them.

Key success factors

- The support of the Student Union.
- The willingness of the students.
- Skilled trainers, working with a well-planned model
- The venue of the Multi-Faith Centre, which was designed by a mix of faith communities and is established as a shared space.

With hindsight

The Multi-Faith Centre is now working with the University’s human resources department to get a good picture of the diversity of the student population, which it hopes will help the project to achieve a more diverse group of participants.

How Faiths in Action funding helped make the project more effective

The project has created a way for the Multi-Faith Centre to connect tangibly with the University’s student body.

When the project funding finishes

The Multi-Faith Centre is discussing the future with other trainers, with a view to extending the programme around the UK. It hopes to build a network which will be able to create a 'community of practice' focused on this programme; European funding has been secured for this.

The Centre would like to deliver the programme in other university settings, but it has not yet begun planning how this might happen.

'The most significant thing about this project has been ...'

'... the opportunity to connect students from diverse faith backgrounds and open their eyes to the wider faith landscape.'

'Through working on this project, the most important thing I've learnt about inter faith working is ...'

'... never be surprised about the quality of interaction that comes out of this sort of programme and how the dynamics of the group actually shape that interaction in a very positive way.'

If you were to give advice to local, regional or national policymakers about the sort of work you've been doing, what would it be?

To continue to take seriously this sort of work with faith communities. With this in mind, create continuity of funding streams.

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Grant value: £11,872 over two years

Staff resource: One part-time staff member

Organisation

Chiltern Racial Equality Council

Project name

Chiltern One World Week

Project purpose

The aim of the project is to bring every part of the community in Chesham together, especially faith communities. One World Week is seen as a good way of doing this because it's a chance to provide a wide variety of activities which are very visible across Chesham.

In particular, members of the steering group are keen to work with young people in the area – both those at school, aged from 11 to 18, and those in further education. They feel that this will help them to reach out into the different communities in Chesham, as the young people bring their families and friends along to events.

Project activities

Chiltern Racial Equality Council (Chiltern REC) has received funding over two years from Faiths in Action to enable it to plan and run a number of activities to celebrate One World Week in June 2009 and June 2010.

Chiltern REC led on forming a steering group, which includes members of the REC committee and local faith leaders.

In addition, a project manager was employed for three months (on a full-time basis) to lead the preparations for One World Week in 2009.

The first step was to start to talk with the various faith communities in Chesham. There was a well-established Muslim community, represented by the Mosque Committee, and an established Christian community represented by Churches Together for Chesham. In addition, the project manager worked to build links with smaller groups, including those from Hindu, Quaker and the Jewish communities. The steering group is keen to include a cultural perspective, so the local Polish and African-Caribbean communities have also been involved.

The steering group came up with lots of ideas for activities to include in Chiltern One World Week. From a long list, the group chose a number of activities, on the basis of what could realistically be organised within the budget and time available. These included:

- the launch of One World Week, with services to start off the week's activities in local places of worship, where the communities prayed for unity, as well as a public launch of one of the school contributions in the Town Hall, where a local vicar, imam and rabbi all prayed together
- open events at local places of worship, such as the Friends' Meeting House, the mosque and the synagogue
- the launch of a schools' project – 'Coming to Chesham' – a video history of faith and immigration in Chesham
- an exhibition at the Town Hall about faiths that are active locally
- assemblies in the secondary schools, led by different faith leaders
- an inter faith football tournament between Muslim and Christian young people
- evening health talks for young Muslims by the Primary Care Trust
- an African-Caribbean drumming workshop
- exhibitions at local libraries about religious persecution in the past (because there are a number of martyrs' memorials in Chesham)
- 'Gig in the Park' – a live music event for young people in Lowndes Park in the centre of Chesham
- a one-day carnival, in conjunction with the schools of Chesham, including a whole range of cultural activities, such as dancing, singing, sports, food and a fairground.

The activities were well attended, with the carnival attracting about 2,000 people and the 'Gig in the Park' about 600 young people. The launch of the 'Coming to Chesham' video was very popular, with about 250 people attending. Other activities each attracted between 20 and 30 people.

The steering group is now working to plan for Chiltern One World Week 2010.

Outcomes

The project is only part-way through, but after the first One World Week, it is possible to see some impact.

Inter faith activity and relationship outcomes

Communities talking to one another for the first time

Although there has been a Muslim community in Chesham for about 50 years, there has been little communication between this community and the Christian community. As a result of this project, faith leaders and members of their faith communities are now talking to one another. The prayer launch of One World Week is thought to be the first time that local Muslim, Christian and Jewish faith leaders have prayed together.

Breaking down barriers

The project has acted as a catalyst to break down barriers, overcoming insularity and giving a purpose to working together.

Young people mixing more with those of other faiths

Young people now seem to form groups more because of where they live, rather than because of their culture or faith, so groups are far more mixed in terms of faith and culture.

People of different faiths enjoying getting to know one another

Participants have said how much they have enjoyed the experience, and are very positive about meeting people of different faiths.

Face to Face and Side by Side building block outcomes

Shared spaces for interaction and social action

Community events in Lowndes Park had previously been stopped because of fears about community safety, but the successes of the 'Gig in the Park' and the carnival have given the local authority and police the confidence to allow the park to be used again. The park has now become a valued shared space, with potential for a variety of activities next year.

Structures and processes that support dialogue and social action

The work of the steering group and the process of planning the One World Week activities have helped to bring different local faith communities together. The steering group is continuing to plan for One World Week in 2010, strengthened by the relationships and the trust built up during the first year.

As a result of working together on this project, the Mosque Committee and Churches Together for Chesham are now talking for the first time about how they can work across their communities, as well as within them. They are developing plans for a young people's project.

Opportunities for learning which build understanding

The project aims to provide all sorts of different activities, to enable different people to learn in different ways.

Other outcomes

- The project has helped to promote the cause of racial equality in Chesham.
- Chiltern REC is finding that more people are approaching it to be volunteers, due to the organisation's higher profile in the area.
- As a result of the REC's growing relationship with the Salvation Army, it has learnt about the Zimbabwean community in Chesham, and it is now working to support this community.

Overcoming barriers

In the early stages, the steering group struggled to get the Mosque Committee and Churches Together for Chesham involved. This was a new project and the steering group had very little time between receiving the grant and the date of One World Week (just three months). This meant there was not enough time to build the relationships and trust that would allow the faith groups to feel comfortable about the project. Employing a project manager enabled One World Week to go ahead in 2009, because the manager took on the bulk of the workload of organising the activities. The manager also acted as a catalyst to develop the relationships between different faith groups. Now that the faith groups have seen how the project works, and appreciate what can

be achieved, they feel more comfortable about taking part. The project manager hopes that various faith groups will take an active role in organising events for Chiltern One World Week in 2010.

To start with, there was little trust between the faith groups. Again, the experience of working together during the first year has shown them what a positive experience this can be.

The police and the local authority had considerable concerns about community safety during events in the park, based on previous experience. The project manager invested a lot of time in preparing risk assessments and talking to officers about how the planned activities would take their concerns into account. In 2009 the events passed off successfully without incident, which should allay any concerns for 2010.

Smaller community groups had some concerns that they would be 'swamped' and would not have a voice. The project manager talked their concerns through with them and is working closely with them throughout the project.

Key success factors

- It was vital to have someone leading the project who could act as a champion – someone who had a vision for the project and who could communicate this effectively.
- It was also important for the project manager to have a good understanding of the different faiths and to be able to demonstrate sensitivity towards people from other faiths.

With hindsight

Ideally, the steering group would have started to plan the project earlier. This was not possible due to the way in which the funding worked. However, the steering group has already started to plan for the 2010 event.

How Faiths in Action funding helped make the project more effective

The Chair of the steering group notes that it would not have been able to organise One World Week in Chesham without the funding.

When the project funding finishes

Chiltern REC aims to continue to run Chiltern One World Week, and to include a faith element within it. The steering group hopes that less external funding will be needed as members of the community take greater ownership of the event. The local authority has given a commitment to sponsoring the ‘Gig in the Park’ event.

‘The most significant thing about this project has been ...’

‘... that it provided an understanding between two communities that had been separate for fifty years.’

‘Through working on this project, the most important thing I’ve learnt about inter faith working is ...’

‘... to demonstrate respect for one another’s faith, from square one ... once respect is there, everything else follows.’

If you were to give one piece of advice to local, regional or national policymakers about the sort of work you’ve been doing, what would it be?

To allow a much longer timeframe for this sort of work. Two years is not enough, because you are dealing with the most important thing in people’s lives – faith. Ideally, a funding programme like this would run for a minimum of three years.

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Grant value: £11,980 over two years

Staff resource: One full-time staff member for three months

Organisation

Churches' Council for Industry and Social Responsibility (ISR)

Project name

The Major Emergency Planning Project

Project purpose

This project is adding an additional element to ISR's ongoing Major Emergency Planning project in Bristol and the surrounding Avon and Somerset area.

For several years now, ISR staff have been working with statutory authorities to bring together more than 100 volunteers from local churches to be trained as chaplains who can be deployed during major emergencies. In these situations, the role of chaplains is to provide support for the people affected by the incident, and for their families and friends. Above all, the chaplain gives space and time and builds a relationship with these people, as the officers from statutory authorities can find it difficult to find the time to do so. The chaplains are in the background at rest centres, temporary mortuaries and other places, providing pastoral care, talking and giving support and comfort.

This project, funded for two years by Faiths in Action, aims to extend the existing project's scope to offer a multi-faith response, so that there are chaplains from a variety of faiths – Muslims, Sikhs, Hindus and Jews, as well as Christians.

The project involves creating a network for the organisations involved in the project, as well as increasing the number of trained volunteer chaplains.

Project activities

The first part of the work has been to find out what faith organisations and groupings of people of faith there are in the project area, and then to make contact with them. The project manager has been able to draw on information from the Bristol Multi-Faith Forum and the regional faith forum, FaithNet South-

West.* The project manager has begun with the Bristol city area, and is moving on to the wider, more rural, surrounding area.

Once the project manager has contact details for faith organisations or groups of people of faith, the next step is to get in touch and to begin the process of building a relationship. The intention is then to invite faith leaders to a community event where they can meet informally over an evening meal, and begin to get to know one another and learn about the project. The leaders can go back to their own communities to discuss the project and think about how they might get involved – for example, identifying people in their community who might be willing to become volunteers.

There is then a longer process of building the relationship between ISR and other organisations, leading to the development of a network that is designed to keep the organisations working together on the project over the longer term. By their very nature, major emergencies take place only rarely, so it may be several years before the volunteers are needed. However, it is crucial that the organisational relationships are maintained and that volunteers are prepared well before there is any incident.

The overall number of volunteer chaplains will increase as new volunteers from different faiths get involved. ISR plans to adapt its existing training to ensure that it is suitable for volunteers from different faiths.

So far, there has been one community event in Bristol, with another planned for Somerset in the early spring, and two more in the second year of the project. More than 20 faith leaders attended the first event. It was organised as an informal event, so people could come to the whole thing, or just part of it. Everyone was given a name badge, so that they could get to know one another on first name terms. The idea was that they could talk informally as they shared food; ISR provided an Asian vegetarian meal. After this, the police chaplain, who is well respected and trusted locally, gave a 'light touch' presentation on the Major Emergency Plan. He explained what the role of the statutory authorities is

* Regional Faith Forums have been funded in each of the English regions following the *Face to Face and Side by Side* government framework.

during major emergency incidents, how faith communities are involved and what the aim of the project is. This was followed by a question-and-answer session, which covered topics such as how volunteers would be trained as chaplains and the sort of support they would get. Overall, the event provided an opportunity for people to explore their expectations about the project.

The faith leaders have now taken this information back to discuss with their communities. They will be working with ISR to identify how they might get involved in the project.

The project manager is now planning the second community event and is researching contacts in the more rural parts of the project area, so that the project can get under way there as well as in the Bristol city area.

Outcomes

The project manager believes that, while it is early days yet for the project, it is already beginning to make a difference.

Inter faith activity and relationship outcomes

Seeing a common purpose

The faith leaders who came to the first community event all recognised the value of the project and could identify with its aims. This sense of common purpose can act as a strong motivator to encourage people of different faiths to work together, and it helps to move discussions away from creed and dogma towards what people have in common.

Talking to one another

The event enabled people of different faiths to meet and talk, often for the first time.

Face to Face and Side by Side building block outcomes

Developing the skills to bridge and link

Later on in the project, the training will focus strongly on giving volunteers the skills they need for working as a chaplain within this multi-faith project. The ethos of the project is very clearly that chaplains are able to provide pastoral care to people of all faiths, if there is an incident where their work is needed.

Shared spaces for interaction and social action

The first community event created a space for faith leaders to get together. ISR deliberately gave the event an informal atmosphere, to create the right environment for the first steps in building the personal relationships that the project manager has identified as crucial to successful multi-faith working.

Structures and processes which support dialogue and social action

One of the aims of the project is to create a network of organisations from different faiths to work together on planning for major emergencies. In essence, this network is a structure whose main purpose is to make it possible to have ongoing dialogue. Although this is in its early stages, the organisations involved so far have all agreed that such a network would be useful, which has given the project manager the starting point he needs to move forward with setting it up.

The event provided a unique opportunity for faith leaders to discuss the community impact of the actions of statutory services in major emergencies, and to talk about what the needs of their faith communities are in such situations. As the project progresses, this will be an ongoing discussion, and one of the ways of building up relationships between faith communities and statutory services.

Opportunities for learning which build understanding

Already, this one event has provided an important opportunity for individuals to increase their understanding of the role of chaplaincy and to think about what this means in the context of different faiths.

Other outcomes

The project manager noted an unexpected but ‘really exciting’ outcome from the work so far on the project. A local Muslim group has approached ISR to discuss the potential for joint chaplaincy work, so there will shortly be an event to bring Muslim and Christian chaplains together to consider this.

Overcoming barriers

The most difficult thing for the project manager has been finding out who to talk to in the first instance, especially in rural areas.

There tend to be fewer people of non-Christian faiths outside large towns, and those people often travel some distance to their place of worship. The regional faith forum FaithNet SouthWest and the Bristol Multi-Faith Forum have been very supportive, helping the project manager by passing on information about groups and individuals. Also, there are faith forums across much of the region, and this has given the project manager another useful starting point.

The project manager noted that there are different structures for faith groups across the project area, and that many groups are completely reliant on volunteers. This means that they may lack the capacity to take part in initiatives such as this – they may find it difficult to ‘look outwards and engage’.

Key success factors

- ISR already had pre-existing, positive relationships that the project manager was able to draw on. The relationships with FaithNet SouthWest and the police were particularly important.
- Through providing good, and appropriate, food at the community event, ISR was able both to show respect to the different cultures of people attending, and to create a sense of hospitality, so that the experience of sharing food helped to build relationships.

With hindsight

The project manager observed that communication by email is not always helpful, as people tend to get overloaded and may not open them or respond to them. Also, if you are relying on a first point of contact in a community to pass a message on to someone else, your email may not get to the person who you actually want to reach. One way of overcoming this is to make personal contact, but meetings can be very time consuming. This is a problem that the project manager continues to grapple with.

How Faiths in Action funding helped make the project more effective

The funding has been fundamental to giving ISR the chance to broaden the existing project to include faiths other than

Christianity. In addition, it has covered costs for the time of administrative staff, which was badly needed to build the network of contacts. This is a very time-consuming task, but absolutely vital.

When the project funding finishes

The project is designed as an ongoing piece of work. By the end of the two years' funding, the project manager hopes that the network will be in place. As the network is not intensive to run, the project manager expects that ISR will be able to cover this work within its existing budgets. The manager is fundraising for a volunteer co-ordinator, in order to be able to sustain relationships with the volunteer chaplains. Training for the volunteers will continue, hopefully within existing resources.

'The most significant thing about this project has been ...'
'... finding a shared purpose and building relationships ... that takes time.'

'Through working on this project, the most important thing I've learnt about multi-faith working is ...'
'... the need to make time to build face-to-face relationships.'

If you were to give advice to local, regional or national policymakers about the sort of work you've been doing, what would it be?

Don't scrimp on the capacity building. To enable these kinds of things to happen, small voluntary groups need to have the space and time to engage in multi-faith activities, and regional faith forums need to be in place and to have the capacity for networking.

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Grant value: £5,550 over two years

Staff resource: One part-time staff member

Chapter Seven

Conclusions

The projects we present in this book demonstrate what can be achieved with relatively small amounts of funding. The grants have acted as a catalyst for a huge variety of community-level activities by faith-based and non-faith-based groups, making a difference to individuals, groups and the wider community.

Individuals taking part in the projects have had the chance to meet people of other faiths, perhaps for the first time. They have grasped unique opportunities to talk to one another in a safe environment. Through this dialogue, they have developed their understanding of one another's faith traditions, beliefs and customs. Some people have been able to overcome their apprehensions about people different to themselves; others have developed new friendships. People are becoming more confident to meet others to talk about faith, and get involved in community activities. Importantly, the participants have enjoyed themselves: they have had fun and they see a benefit in building inter faith relationships. People from different faiths have recognised their differences and celebrated what they have in common.

There have been benefits for the organisations as well. Crucially, they have been able to run activities that they would not otherwise have been able to do, and so respond to needs that they have identified in their communities. The remit of the Faiths in Action funding programme has given organisations the freedom to work on projects with a faith dimension. This is particularly important for faith-based organisations that sometimes struggle to win grant funding because of often unfounded concerns around proselytism. Several non-faith organisations have brought faith into their work for the first time, which they feel has enriched the work they are doing and has enabled them to respond to their local community's needs and reflect these communities more fully. Organisations have reached out to build relationships with other organisations:

community level organisations with their regional faith forums, non-faith with faith-based organisations in the same area, and between local faith organisations representing different faiths.

Both groups and individuals have taken action to make a difference in their local areas. The dialogue that the projects created has helped to break down barriers between communities, contributing to easing and preventing tensions. Working together for common purpose has created some physical changes to communities as well, including two community gardens open to all. Some of the projects, too, have used the faith perspective to tackle the issue of climate change.

Some projects target their work at children and young people who range from primary school age through to university students. Often, these projects offer a unique opportunity for children and young people to discuss faith in groups where several faiths are represented. The projects provide a framework for dialogue, using imaginative approaches such as superhero cartoon characters and offering hands-on experiences that young people feel comfortable with and help them to learn.

Some projects focus on women. The projects offer them new opportunities to take part in social activities and inter faith discussions. Whether through formal training or informal learning, many women and girls have gained skills and confidence to become more active in inter faith work themselves or to socialise with people from other faith backgrounds.

The Faiths in Action grant funding has been crucial. The project managers are clear that without it, many of the outcomes described in this book would simply not have happened because they would not have been able to run their projects. However, there is more to it than this. The community development approach the Faiths in Action programme takes has been vital, offering the organisations support whilst delivering their projects, and giving them the flexibility they have needed to do their work and achieve their intended outcomes.

There is so much to learn from the projects showcased in this book, as well as many others funded by Faiths in Action. There are new ideas; there are tried and tested approaches which have been

put into practice in a new location or by a different organisation; there are stories of hurdles overcome and of things that have really helped a project to work. Together, these case studies have shown what local people and local community groups can do to bring people together, so that they truly are face to face and side by side.

Leaving the last word to the project managers

The people who are best placed to comment on what we can learn about inter faith working are those who have been directly involved in making these projects happen: the project managers themselves.

We asked every project manager who helped us to create a case study what is the most important thing they learnt about inter faith working as a result of running their project. This is a selection of what they had to say.

‘Personal relationships are really important, and they are key to building trust.’

‘While we express our faiths in different ways, we care about the same things.’

‘It all spins out from personal relationships.’

‘When you find the right project, there’s the will to work together.’

‘Allow time.’

‘Making time to build face-to-face relationships.’

‘It’s long term. There’s a lot of potential in the wisdom and values that different people can contribute and what they can do when working together.’

‘Setting up a context for people to get to know one another and for deeper sharing is really important for inter faith understanding. It doesn’t just happen: it needs some tools and processes to happen, combined with commitment and passion.’

‘Not to have any preconceptions about what faith groups are willing to do – and ask people the question directly.’

‘Demonstrate respect for one another’s faith, from square one: once respect is there, everything else follows.’

‘The value of giving young people a forum to discuss faith openly, to break down the barriers that might prevent them from talking and asking questions.’

‘Knowing what you’re talking about and researching it properly. Get to know what’s sensitive, what people will and won’t want to talk about.’

‘I hope we’ve made a difference and that people take something home with them.’





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Faith matters

By Irene Evison

Faith matters is a collection of case studies of projects funded by the Faiths in Action grant programme. It offers a window into the successes and challenges, the barriers and opportunities facing faith and inter faith work in England. By recognising and supporting the distinctive contribution of faith to our society, projects like these are building more cohesive communities. This book includes:

- 19 in-depth case studies of faith work focused on the environment, dialogue, young people and social action
- lessons learned from the projects regarding faith and inter faith working, including the ingredients for success, barriers to overcome and practical considerations
- key messages for policymakers on faith and community cohesion.

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The £4 million grant scheme is part of the Faiths in Action programme managed by the Community Development Foundation (CDF). The programme forms part of the Communities and Local Government (CLG) framework, *Face to Face and Side by Side: A framework for partnership in our multi faith society*.

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