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# What Works in Enabling Cross-Community Interactions?

**Perspectives on good policy and practice**



# What Works in Enabling Cross-Community Interactions?

## **Perspectives on good policy and practice**

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The National Community Forum

March 2009

Department for Communities and Local Government

The findings and recommendations in this report are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of the Department for Communities and Local Government.

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# Executive Summary

Policy and research literature are increasingly concerned with a perceived lack of interaction between different people within communities, including avoidance and conflict between diverse groups within localities. The importance of such interaction is clearly evidenced for community welfare, relationships, social capital and the tackling of social exclusion and racism. Yet just placing groups in the same physical spaces is no guarantee of interaction. In this context, grassroots community groups and activists can often play an important yet under-recognised role in bringing together people of different ages, faiths, ethnicity, ability, economic status, culture, etc.

This report briefly reviews the evidence for the current state of community interaction within England, together with theoretical approaches such as 'contact theory' which can inform activities that bring individuals and groups together. Building on this basis, the report then draws on the extensive expertise of 28 practitioners from across the country selected because of their diverse grassroots experience of bringing different individuals and groups together.

These practitioners highlighted a creative range of activities which can be used to stimulate greater interaction and enable prejudice to be constructively challenged. At the same time, they emphasised the importance of adapting any activity to the particular local context, building relationships to determine what might work best in any one particular area.

Despite the demonstrable potential of these activities, the practitioners also highlighted multiple obstacles which can inhibit their ability to improve positive and meaningful interactions within communities. Some of these obstacles are personal, such as people's comfort in their existing relationships, their lack of time for such interaction, and the multiple ways in which fear can form a barrier to interacting with those who are perceived to be different from themselves. Other obstacles were organisational, with poorly-designed interventions and poorly-trained/uncommitted staff limiting activities' effectiveness. Even when such obstacles could be overcome, there often remained a substantial yet necessary task to persuade people of the value of interaction and find gradual, low-key ways to build their opportunities for finding common ground with others. Reinforcing and even exacerbating these obstacles were substantial problems caused by current approaches to distributing funding, especially when combined with wider structural and political inequalities.

To overcome these obstacles, the research highlights four key principles which are crucial for enabling interaction, and which underpin the National Community Forum's recommendations for further developing the potential of this work.

## **Principles 1 and 2**

**Spaces, activities and networks need to be created which enable interaction to take place, building on people's diverse layers of identities. However, the way that these spaces, activities and networks are designed is crucial to their potential success, highlighting the need for an improved understanding of the processes which promote interaction.**

### **Recommendation 1**

That practitioners in community and statutory organisations work to create spaces where people can meet in low-key ways, based on aspects of their identities and interests which they hold in common, but which leave them space to explore difference in other respects.

### **Recommendation 2**

That practitioners in community and statutory organisations identify contact points which link groups and play a discerning proactive role in bringing these together, encouraging wider connections between groups without undermining existing connections because they are 'not representative enough'.

### **Recommendation 3**

That DCLG and other research funding bodies consider funding additional research and resources which focus specifically on the skills and processes that practitioners and organisations can use to bring individuals and groups together successfully, to verify, develop and publicise these findings further.

### **Recommendation 4**

That statutory agencies in particular provide services and spaces when and where people need them, not just when and where they are convenient to provide. This may mean taking sensible risks with small emerging groups, as well as training core staff and enabling them to use their time to actively promote interaction.

### **Recommendation 5**

That funders and statutory agencies, as well as those running these activities, recognise the importance of having positive community activities and spaces used by multiple interacting groups which are not stigmatised by being organised around a problem or restricted to those holding a single aspect of shared identity. Consequently, these agencies and funders should consider whether they can also support activities which bridge across communities whilst promoting positive aspects of them.



### Recommendation 6

Even where activities are oriented around addressing problematic community relations between particular groups, funders and those running these activities should work together to recognise the long-term nature of any process of change. This will often involve managing expectations of these activities to keep them realistic, so as to enable contact and interaction to be developed gradually over the longer term, as this can ultimately facilitate more meaningful interaction.

#### Principle 3

**Those who are involved in promoting these activities from within particular communities can often face substantial opposition and a high personal cost for their involvement, so they need valuing, supporting, training and sustaining.**

### Recommendation 7

That existing community groups, infrastructure bodies, and statutory agencies should all work together to identify, encourage, value, support, and offer training to emerging leaders who are trying to bring people together to engage in positive interaction with each other.

### Recommendation 8

To do this, these bodies should consider resourcing a supportive infrastructure that will offer support to existing and emerging activists and practitioners, including free mentoring, training and opportunities to share with others involved in similar activity, in order to reduce isolation and develop practice.

#### Principle 4

**The wider social, political and funding context can have a profound impact on these activities, highlighting the importance of creating a conducive context which supports these interactions, tackles inequalities, and encourages their sustainability.**

### Recommendation 9

That those delivering services are more aware of the potential resentment which can be created from the provision of separate and/or targeted services for particular groups, and strive to encourage complementary delivery so that other groups do not feel that they lose out as a result.

### **Recommendation 10**

That statutory organisations and other funders consider how to overcome the highlighted ways that current funding approaches can contribute to divisions and be detrimental to developing more positive interactions over the long term. In particular, these bodies should consider providing and/or pooling funds for positive, small scale community activities that address a wide range of different agency targets in an integrated way.

### **Recommendation 11**

DCLG and other funders should consider undertaking combined quality research into the effectiveness of small-scale community activity in enabling positive meaningful interaction between different individuals and groups. This work could consider how best to measure the effectiveness of such work, rather than requiring each individual practitioner and group to prove the efficacy of their work. This is particularly necessary given the small-scale nature of such work and the need to develop appropriate research methodologies that can capture this effectiveness in a more integrated way.

Ultimately, these findings highlight how developing improved interactions is a long term, educational and relational process; ie it is an art which requires committed practitioners who are able to draw individuals and groups together to find commonalities and explore differences, whilst managing their own identity and role in the process. Nevertheless, there is much that wider organisations and policy-makers can do to promote, support or inhibit this work, both directly and in contributing towards the environment in which it takes place. The National Community Forum believes that this is where organisations and policy-makers at local and national levels need to model the positive interaction that they wish to see happen within local communities, by working on these issues together.

# Chapter 1

## Cross-Community Interactions – An Introduction

“Community diversity isn’t just about gender, ethnicity or equal opportunity; it is more broadly about difference and nurturing a sense of community between all the various groups living in an area. In practice, diversity can manifest itself through differences in peoples’ life and work experiences, their gender, sexuality, age, ethnicity, ability, cultural background, religious beliefs and socio-economic background.”

(Development Trusts Association, 2006:1)

“The promise of a reinvigorated public realm seems to be the promise of re-engagement between all groups, with benefits that extend from everyday sociability to increased engagement, participation in society and community cohesion. But these hopes stand in stark contrast to the reality of mutual avoidance and community conflict as played out in the public sphere of Britain’s neighbourhoods.”

(Lownsborough and Beunderman, 2007:8)

“It’s difficult when we try to bring people together; people prefer to interact with their own.”

(Practitioner, National Community Forum Event)

This report summarises the outcome of an investigation by the National Community Forum<sup>1</sup> into issues currently affecting interactions between different individuals and groups within communities in England. The report has been compiled on behalf of the National Community Forum by Andrew Orton<sup>2</sup>, who was commissioned as an independent consultant to support the Forum in reviewing the literature and writing this report.

<sup>1</sup> The National Community Forum is a non-departmental advisory body which has produced this report as part of its role to provide a ‘sounding board’ to Government on the impact of policy on deprived groups and areas, based on their own experience. For more information, see: [www.communities.gov.uk/communities/communityempowerment/whatweare/ncf/](http://www.communities.gov.uk/communities/communityempowerment/whatweare/ncf/).

<sup>2</sup> Andrew Orton is a social policy researcher and independent consultant with a background of working as a community and youth worker. He was previously a member of the National Community Forum for five years, and is also a tutor in Community and Youth Work at Durham University, where he recently gained a doctorate in exploring ‘Faith, Dialogue and Difference in Christian Community Work’. To contact the author, please email: [andreworton@communityconsultancy.fslife.co.uk](mailto:andreworton@communityconsultancy.fslife.co.uk).

The focus of this report is on analysing the issues faced by practitioners who are bringing these individuals and groups together. In doing this, the report highlights the characteristics of interventions which can help improve interactions in particular local areas. In the process, several strategic policy issues are identified which are having a significant impact on the potential of local practitioners to develop meaningful interactions between individuals and groups. Building on this analysis, recommendations for policy and practice are made for practitioners, local authorities, other statutory and voluntary organisations, and policy-makers.

# Chapter 2

## Setting the Context: Policy and Evidence

The National Community Forum is not alone in being concerned with a perceived lack of interaction between different groups within communities. Indeed, a wide range of research and policy literature indicates that this is an increasingly important issue within the current policy context.<sup>3</sup> This literature base has developed from several academic disciplines and policy debates, and provides some key research evidence which has informed the National Community Forum's approach to this topic.

### National policy concerns and related evidence

At a national level, the current importance attributed to this issue is perhaps best illustrated by the adoption of 'PSA Delivery Agreement 21' (HM Treasury, 2007). Two of the key indicators used to measure progress on community cohesion and interaction within this agreement are:

"Indicator 1: The percentage of people who believe people from different backgrounds get on well together in their local area.

Indicator 2: The percentage of people who have meaningful interactions with people from different backgrounds."

This builds on research for the Commission on Integration and Cohesion (2007:8), which found that 79% of people thought people of different backgrounds got on well in their local area. However, despite this rather optimistic figure, both research and policy have recognised significant social issues arising from a perceived lack of interactions between different people within local areas and public spaces. For example, in 2000, only 36% of respondents to the British Crime Survey said their neighbourhood was a place where people "do things together and try to help each other", whereas around 49% saw their area as a place "where people mostly go their own way" (Home Office, cited in Haezwindt, 2003). More recently, as will shortly be demonstrated, concerns have grown that communities are increasingly interacting less for a range of reasons, not least a decline in trust and civic participation and an increase in social polarisation between individuals and groups.

<sup>3</sup> In order to provide a short accessible introduction, detailed debates about individual topics have been left to one side. Instead, for each topic, links to further reading (often in the form of freely-accessible internet links) have been provided in the bibliography to enable readers to follow up areas of interest in more detail.

Such concerns have been heightened by research which shows increasing diversity accompanied by increased physical segregation between different groups (Cantle, 2005; Lownsbrough and Beunderman, 2007). Whilst this segregation has been of particular concern in terms of ethnicity, similar concerns have been applied to a range of other groups. Such segregation can exacerbate inequality, as the government's previous work on neighbourhood renewal (outlined in Social Exclusion Unit, 2001; Prime Minister's Strategy Unit, 2005) illustrates well.

## Residential segregation and/or mixed communities?

In response to these concerns over difficulties caused by areas experiencing multiple deprivation and/or segregation between different ethnic or other social groups, Government policy has increasingly been concerned with promoting 'mixed communities' (Bailey et al., 2006). Such communities aim to attract mixes of income, tenure, sizes, ages, ethnicity, etc. in order to avoid the problems associated with physical concentrations of particular deprived groups in segregated spaces.

Underlying these initiatives is the expectation that by co-locating diverse groups, physical segregation can be reduced, and as a result, these groups will be more likely to interact cohesively, as Hudson (2007:30) describes:

"living in a diverse neighbourhood was thought to result in greater exposure to different ethnic cultures, which would potentially lead to greater tolerance and understanding. ... Conversely, people felt that a lack of knowledge and understanding of people from different ethnic backgrounds, resulting from limited interaction, would foster intolerance and fuel racism."

## Is living nearby enough? "Parallel lives" and community cohesion

However, just because diverse individuals and groups live in a mixed community doesn't necessarily mean that they will form positive relationships with each other. In fact, the opposite can be true; for example, the 2003 Citizenship Survey<sup>4</sup> (Pennant, 2005:1) found that "the more ethnically diverse an area is, the less likely people are to trust others in that area".

<sup>4</sup> Based on a nationally representative survey of 9,486 people + an additional 4,571 from minority ethnic groups in England.

In fact, what can happen instead is that individuals and groups can end up living “parallel lives” (Cantle, 2005<sup>5</sup>) in which they share spaces but do not interact. Moreover, placing diverse communities in close proximity to each other, especially in situations of competition over limited resources, can increase the potential for conflict. This is because, without the kinds of interaction that result in positive relationships being formed, there is a high potential for people to scapegoat those who are different and blame them for the ills of the neighbourhood. The groups blamed for these problems can include ‘foreigners’, refugees and asylum seekers (Hudson et al, 2007); young people (Moore and Statham, 2007); those on benefits<sup>6</sup>; travellers (Richardson, 2007) and many other groups.

Policy concerns about relations between segregated communities (and difficulties in the relationships themselves) have also been exacerbated by wider events and the subsequent policy and media discourses, which add to the recurrent social tendency to create ‘folk devils’ (as described well in the classic study by Cohen, 1987). An obvious recent example has been the way that terrorist attacks, international events and even domestic Government responses are being related to a rise in Islamophobia (Richardson, 2004). Such issues have resulted in underlying concerns over the need to develop shared values, challenging previous notions of multiculturalism which allow for (and sometimes even encourage) different groups to remain diverse in their patterns of living.<sup>7</sup> The tension between these approaches has been particularly apparent when related to controversial issues such as immigration (Zetter et al, 2006).

## Faith

Increasingly, especially following 9/11, the community cohesion agenda has broadened out to include an additional specific focus on including faith groups. The resulting policies have often interacted in complex ways with other government agendas, which have increasingly sought to involve faith groups in service delivery and include them in governance arrangements (see, for example, Lowndes and Chapman, 2005). One example of this is the Government’s ‘Faith Communities Capacity Building Fund’, managed by the Community Development Foundation. The evaluation of the first round of this fund (James, 2007) found that spaces and services provided by faith groups were frequently used by people from diverse backgrounds, enabling different groups (including those who might otherwise be socially excluded) to meet and interact. This chimes with other research (eg Farnell et al, 2003; Farnell et al, 2006; Orton, 2008), although such research also notes that some faith groups and related provision can be delivered in a less inclusive way,

<sup>5</sup> This description originally arose out of the 2001 riots in Northern English towns, but has since been applied to a broader range of community cohesion issues by Cantle in this useful, more recent text.

<sup>6</sup> The perennial raising of debates about an ‘underclass’ of anti-social, benefit-dependent people, drawing on the controversial work of Charles Murray, is a case in point. Murray describes the underclass as those who “are at the margins of society, unsocialised and often violent. ... [not only] the chronic criminal [but also] parents who mean well but cannot provide for themselves, who give nothing back to the neighbourhood and whose children are the despair of the teachers who have to deal with them” (Murray, 2001:2). Murray’s work was originally based on the American context, but he has also applied the analysis to Britain, describing his initial forays into Britain as being “a visitor from a plague area who had come to see whether the disease was spreading” (Green, 2001:vii). This work has been heavily critiqued; see Phillips (2001) for an example.

<sup>7</sup> For an influential defence of a multiculturalist position, see Parekh (2000; 2005).

contributing to the exclusion of other groups (see also Furbey and Macey, 2005; Furbey et al, 2006). Particularly controversial are Government attempts to introduce more faith schools (see Department for Children, Schools and Families, 2007 for the Government position). By attempting to co-opt faith groups into consensual agendas, current Government approaches have also been critiqued by many of the above reports for leaving little room to take into account the impact of faith groups' diverse worldviews/theologies, which can sometimes include perspectives which critique as well as overlap with those of other faith groups, community organisations and secular government agencies. Most recently, this has led to the Department for Communities and Local Government (2007) issuing a consultation paper on 'a framework for inter-faith dialogue and social action'<sup>8</sup> to explore this further.

## Addressing social exclusion

This example highlights a further area of policy concern, social exclusion, which has developed out of increasing evidence that particular groups can be excluded from everyday interactions enjoyed by others wherever they live (although this exclusion may be heightened by their physical location). At worst, these groups can experience prejudice and stigma which isolates them from wider social interaction; in other cases, it may simply be lack of an ability to get out of the house, or government systems which cannot cope with their individual/groups' circumstances. For example, a representative survey of 1,864 adults aged 16+ by Ray et al (2006) found that "contact between age groups was age-restricted", and that this resulted in increased prejudice and discrimination based on stereotypes of both older and younger people. In particular, the survey found that "More people of all ages had positive contact with younger people than older people (80% overall having a friendship with someone under 30 compared to 67% having a friendship with someone over 70)". In addition, "older people are stereotyped as 'warm' [friendly] and 'not competent' [whereas] younger people are stereotyped as 'cold' [unfriendly] and 'competent' ". Other groups reporting themselves as experiencing discrimination and exclusion include travellers (Friends, Families and Travellers, 2007), and those with disabilities. Despite experiencing profound difficulties on arrival, research shows that community tensions are not inevitably experienced even by groups such as new immigrants. For example, perspectives of immigrants can depend on the characteristics of the neighbourhood, media portrayal, immigration policy, settlement patterns, identities and support received by immigrants; indeed they can act as an 'engine for regeneration' (Robinson and Reeve, 2006).

Overall, social cohesion might be understood as requiring two principal elements: "the reduction of disparities, inequalities and social exclusion" and "the strengthening of social relations, interactions and ties" (Berger-Schmitt, 2000:28, cited in Hudson et al, 2007:2). Having briefly discussed the former, we will now consider the latter.

<sup>8</sup> This consultation closed on 7 March 2008.



## Diversity, social trust and interaction

Evidence on the context for social relations and interactions within the UK presents a mixed picture. Haezwindt (2003:19) argues that:

“The United Kingdom has a long tradition of civic culture with high levels of social trust, and political and civic participation.”

Despite this historical tradition, in recent years, perceptions of community interactions have changed considerably, and shown distinct patterns between diverse groups. For example, recent large survey findings summarised by Haezwindt (2003)<sup>9</sup> illustrates the following:

- Trust in neighbours rises steadily with age, with only 39% of those aged 16 to 29 trusting most or many of their neighbours compared to 75% if those aged 70 and above (General Household Survey, 2000/1, Office for National Statistics)
- There were also significant patterns dependent on family composition and household type, with married couples generally having high levels of social support, high levels of reciprocity with neighbours and most likely to be trusting of them. “Single people were less likely to be civically engaged and be less neighbourly than other groups, but there were more likely to have satisfactory friendship networks. . . . High proportions of long parent households were likely to have both satisfactory friendship and relatives networks. Non-related households, such as people in flat-shares, were least likely to know, trust and speak to neighbours, and low proportions also reported having a satisfactory relatives network” (p.22)
- Tenure and length of residence were also significant factors in people having satisfactory relatives or friendship networks. The percentage of people having at least one close friend/relative living nearby and who saw or spoke to relatives or friends at least once a week rises sharply depending on length of residence in an area. For relatives, this figure rose from 34% for those who had lived in their residence for less than five years to 65% for those who had lived in their residence for 20 or more years. (For friends, the figures are from 53% to 72% respectively.) In terms of giving reciprocal help to each other, “58% of homeowners, 42% of social renters and only 34% of private renters were found to have high reciprocity” (p.23). This is also connected to deprivation, with those people who live in the least deprived areas participating more than those who live in more deprived areas in civic and social activities, and both formal and informal volunteering (Home Office Citizenship Survey, 2001). However, economically inactive people were found to be those most likely to be involved in voluntary work (ONS Omnibus Survey, 2001).

However, this data mainly refers to differences in social interaction analysed by different social groups; whilst this sets an important context, in order to directly address the topic of interactions between different social groups, it is first helpful to consider a further concept, social capital.

<sup>9</sup> Additional, more recent related statistics drawn from the 2005 Citizenship Survey can be found in Kitchen, et al (2006).

## Chapter 3

# Social Capital – Bonding, Bridging and Linking

“Social capital is the social glue that helps people, organisations and communities to work together towards shared goals. It comes from everyday contact between people, as a result of their forming social connections and networks based on trust, shared values, and reciprocity (or ‘give and take’).”

(North East Social Capital Forum, 2006:3)

There are various definitions available of social capital, notably Putman’s (2000), but Field summarises them in two words: “*relationships matter*” (Field, 2003:1, cited in Furbey et al, 2006:5). There is a vast and growing literature on social capital, the full extent of which cannot be summarised here.<sup>10</sup> However, research has been increasingly concerned with three different types of relationships which each make different contributions to community interactions. These are summarised by the North East Social Capital Forum (2006:10) in the following way:

**Bonding social capital:** Social capital can be a bond between people: a common identity, purpose or tie that connects similar people, such as members of the same family, ethnic group, club, or community organisation, or neighbours. Bonding social capital is the strongest type, linking us with friends and family and helping us to ‘get by’ in life.

**Bridging social capital:** Social capital can be a bridge when it links people with different interests and views – such as people in associations, trade unions, or fellowships – or from different age, ethnic, or income groups. Bridging social capital involves the weaker ties we have with work colleagues and contacts, acquaintances and friends of friends. It can help us to ‘get ahead’ in life.

**Linking social capital:** Social capital can be a link between people who have differing levels of power or social status, such as different social classes, or political links. Linking social capital can be a way to get support from formal institutions or people in power.”

<sup>10</sup> For one useful international gateway to the huge range of information on this topic, see: [www.socialcapitalgateway.org](http://www.socialcapitalgateway.org). For an easy language introduction, see North East Social Capital Forum (2006) at [tinyurl.com/2hm3w7](http://tinyurl.com/2hm3w7). A more critical brief academic introduction is provided by Smith (2007) at [www.infed.org/biblio/social\\_capital.htm](http://www.infed.org/biblio/social_capital.htm). UK statistics, together with relevant UK papers and sample questions, can be found via: [www.statistics.gov.uk/socialcapital/](http://www.statistics.gov.uk/socialcapital/).

There are great difficulties in measuring social capital, not least in that many of the indicators used can be culturally-specific or more likely to favour particular groups; for example, Whiting and Harper (2003) found that many of the indicators in use discriminated against young people aged 16-24.

Social capital is not necessarily positive in its outcomes; as the North East Social Capital Forum note, criminal organisations such as the Mafia might be argued to show high levels of social capital, and an overemphasis on what binds a group together may exclude those who are different (Furbey et al, 2006). This has raised a complex debate over whether or not groups focused on single cultural or faith identities should be encouraged, especially in terms of whether they should be eligible for public funding<sup>11</sup>. Nevertheless:

*“It is important to recognise that these differences are as important as what brings a community together. In this sense, nurturing the bonds that exist within a particular identity group will be as important as building bridges between all the various groups that make up the community as a whole.”*

(Development Trusts Association, 2006:1)

What is increasingly emerging as important is the presence or absence of a complex web of different identifications and contacts which may enable individuals and communities to respond to conflictual situations when they arise and enable people to encounter and learn from difference in a positive way. For example, if an individual solely identifies with their area as their main source of identity, they will find it difficult to relate to someone from another area; however, if they find they have something other than their area in common with someone from outside their area, this may form a potential ‘bridge’ to enable a relationship to be built. It is here that theories of prejudice, discrimination, identity and social contact become crucially important.

<sup>11</sup> See, for example, the debate recorded in Annex D (pp. 160-163) of the Commission on Integration and Cohesion’s (2007) final report. This report summarises the DCLG analysis of the Citizenship Survey evidence in two clear points: “Those who have bonding social capital are more likely to bridge” and “Cohesion is higher amongst those who bridge for almost every ethnic group”. Whilst the evidence covered in this literature review strongly supports these findings, this literature review develops the implications further than the recommendations which the Commission on Integration and Cohesion reached, in ways that will shortly be demonstrated.

## Chapter 4

# Reducing Prejudice and Discrimination: Contact Theory

There is a broad body of social psychological work on the nature of prejudice and discrimination which builds on the seminal contribution of Allport (1979). Allport's work in the American context, originally published in 1954, set the agenda for much subsequent work, not least by proposing what is now termed 'contact theory' (Dovidio, Glick and Rudman, 2005). 'Contact theory' states that:

"Prejudice... may be reduced by equal status contact between majority and minority groups in the pursuit of common goals. The effect is greatly enhanced if this contact is sanctioned by institutional supports (ie by law, custom or local atmosphere), and provided it is of a sort that leads to the perception of common interests and common humanity between members of the two groups."

(Allport, 1979:281)

Both the interaction arising from cross-group friendship and the knowledge that such friendships exist have recently been found to reduce prejudice against members of other groups (Paolini, Hewstone and Cairns, 2007).<sup>12</sup> For example, research into interactions between different age groups also supports these findings:

"Positive contact (eg close, personal friendship) between members of different groups in society has been shown to reduce prejudice and discrimination. Conversely, lack of positive contact, or contact which is negative, can increase the likelihood of prejudice. The survey found that .... Those who had positive contact with older people were less likely to believe that competence declined with age, and more likely to perceive commonalities between younger and older people."

(Ray, Sharp and Abrams, 2006:6-7)<sup>13</sup>

<sup>12</sup> As Paolini et al report, this also corresponds with earlier work by Pettigrew (1997) and Wright et al (1997) respectively.

<sup>13</sup> Ray, Sharp and Abrams report includes an appendix, Annex 2, which provides a more detailed summary of prejudice, discrimination and contact theories in relation to older people and cross-generational work.

## Individual or group interaction?

However, an important distinction increasingly being made in the literature is between (i) individual interactions when they might be seen just as interpersonal contact, and (ii) individual/collective interactions which might be considered inter-group relationships (Kenworthy et al, 2005). Each of these may affect the other, but they are not necessarily the same thing. The former can just result in people acknowledging exceptions to their generally prejudiced attitudes; the latter offers hope that people will generalise this positive experience to members of the out-group more generally.<sup>14</sup> The processes at work within inter-group encounters continue to be the subject of widespread research and debate (see, for example, Brown and Gaertner's 2003 edited collection). Within this research generally, there are often difficulties in establishing the direction of causality: contact may lead to decreased stereotyping which may in turn lead to a greater likelihood of positive interaction, but where does this virtuous cycle start, and what of those who resist such contact or enter into it with closed minds?

## Spaces for encounter and interaction

This highlights the importance of finding ways to start this process somewhere, and supporting the resulting encounter-interactions so that they can be positive in character. Research on where such encounters may happen highlights the importance of informal everyday interaction within shared spaces, not just projects and programmes directly focused on reducing prejudice. Community activities can play an important role in creating opportunities for one or more of these types of social capital by enabling people to be connected and act collectively on issues of concern to them. Within community projects and groups, people can interact within spaces which provide support for making connections between different individuals and groups where they don't already exist. For example, Taylor's (2007) study of three Neighbourhood Management areas found that social capital was particularly built through establishing local groups, especially focused on children and young people, tackling negative stereotypes of the neighbourhood and particular groups within it, creating opportunities for people to work together on common goals, and link with service providers. Taylor particularly notes the "value of community hubs – neighbourhood offices, community centres, radio stations, local parks – in giving the neighbourhood an identity that people can relate to and opportunities for people to come together" (p.7), as well as the contributions made by faith communities in similar ways.

<sup>14</sup> Also see Hewstone and Brown (1986) for an earlier discussion which summarises these different issues in a useful way, and lists earlier research findings on factors which contribute towards favourable/unfavourable encounters.

However, these places for interaction are wider than just community hubs or projects, and depend on a much broader set of possibilities for encounter being present across society. They also involve a more nuanced recognition of the multiple aspects of an individual's social identity, which may or may not involve a strong level of identification with the area in which they live. This involves recognising the different environments in which people who share some aspects of their identities but differ in other respects may interact in a particular environment. Cattle (2005:177) summarises these different places for cross-cultural contact and engagement (in ways which work for cross-community interactions more generally) using the categories listed in the following table:

**Table 1: Cattle's types of cross-community interaction**

**"Associational**

*Intra-associational – integrated and multiple identity*

Associations ... open to people of different backgrounds and facilitate interchange and co-operation within the organisation

*Inter-associational – networked single identity bodies*

Associations represent[ing] separate and distinct interests on an exclusive and single identity basis, with associations formed by networks of separate bodies

**Social**

*Social Incidental – arising from everyday activity*

Interaction by individuals meeting through shopping, travelling or leisure activities, at an individual level, without organisation

*Social Organisational – arising from planned and organised activity*

Interaction by participating in sporting, music, drama and arts, which involves group activities, generally organised through clubs and societies

**Structural**

*Structural Cross-cultural Contact*

This will depend upon the extent to which schools and housing are segregated, employment opportunities are linked to particular groups and market factors create divisions, which militate against cross-cultural engagement"

In summarising the available literature, it is clear that all of these types of contact are important in enabling cross-community interactions, not just one or two of them. Indeed, they are mutually supportive, with each potentially reinforcing the opportunities inherent in the others in ways that any one type of activity by itself would not be. One type of activity may lead to another; for example, people from different backgrounds who meet in structured exchanges between groups may be more likely to greet each other informally on the street the following day. However, the likelihood of one interaction leading to another clearly depends on the quality of the initial interaction and whether it successfully enables new relationships to be built, or whether instead it just reinforces existing prejudice.

## The potential contribution of community work

If both the availability of appropriate spaces and the quality of interaction within these spaces are as crucial as the research suggests, then community work projects (such as those which Forum members and local voluntary groups are involved in on an everyday basis) offer significant potential to contribute to effective cross-community interactions. However, this potential frequently appears to have been relatively unrecognised, despite its close links with the conclusions drawn from the research summarised above. Through both informal and more structured interventions, community work by local projects might be argued to contribute to effective cross-community interactions in several ways, including:

1. Facilitating and supporting the development of multiple associations based on different aspects of interests and identities, where people from different backgrounds can find common concerns and explore their differences in an arena where they already share something else in common with the others participating.
2. Facilitating existing interactions between groups to help ensure that these interactions are positive in character, challenge divisive stereotypes, help build positive individual relationships, and (where possible) are organised in such a way as to enable participants and the wider community to generalise their learning from this encounter to the wider group.
3. Proactively stimulating opportunities for different individuals and groups to interact when this interaction is not happening naturally. This can be both through targeted interventions and providing supported spaces where informal everyday conversations and introductions can take place. The range of work here is particularly important. Overt, targeted work has as its central aim the bringing together of two or more groups, often where there is a history of conflict. This type of work can be helpful in building initial bridges between existing well-defined groups where these contain some members who are open-minded to this sort of activity. This work may be helpful in making links between representatives from different groups to develop new joint activity, for example. However, this work can exclude those whose prejudice means that they are unlikely to get involved in activity which is specifically labelled as cross-

community in nature. Subtler everyday work based within communities has the potential to stimulate different kinds of cross-community interaction, by reaching those with prejudices and gently challenging these through more informal (but supported) encounters.

4. Where structural divisions or inequalities exist that exacerbate conflict between different groups within a community, community workers can help groups to find common interests in challenging these divisions and inequalities, working together and building relationships in the process.

## The potential impact of government policy

Government policies can also have a significant impact in shaping the environment for these interactions which can work in conjunction with cross-community interactions within particular areas, or make them more difficult. For example, Ray, Sharp and Abrams (2006:8) conclude that both local cross-community interaction initiatives and appropriate policies are needed to enable increased intergenerational contact:

“policies which segregate older people (eg within healthcare, social care or housing) need to be considered carefully in light of their potential effects on ageism within society. Equally, initiatives which encourage working together across age groups, including intergenerational projects, should be encouraged and evaluated from the point of view of reducing ageism.”

The impact of common policy processes also need to be evaluated in light of their potential impact on cross-community interactions; not least in recognising more fully the problems that arise from getting different groups to bid competitively against each other for limited resources, thus structurally encouraging competition and rivalry between diverse groups (see, for example, Cattle, 2005). Further policy implications are highlighted by the additional research conducted by Ipsos-MORI (2007) into ‘what works in community cohesion’ within six case study areas for the Commission on Integration and Cohesion.

## Gaps in existing literature

Despite all this increasing interest in the value of cross-community interactions, there appears to remain substantial international debate over what works in terms of facilitating cross-community contact programmes (Stephan and Stephan, 2005). There is little conclusive evidence specifically addressing this question in the UK<sup>15</sup>, although there are occasional small-scale evaluation studies of particular programmes (see, for example, Esterhuizen and Murphy, 2007) and articles on related topics (see, for example, Moore and Statham’s 2006 article evaluating the potential of intergenerational programmes

<sup>15</sup> Much of the available research found focuses on either the USA or specific conflict zones elsewhere in the world.



in reducing anti-social behaviour and fear of crime in the UK). Stephan and Stephan (2005:443) outline particular gaps in the existing small scale evaluations of specific programmes:

“Most evaluations currently concentrate on short-term changes in perceptions and a limited range of self-reported behaviours (eg inter-group friendships). Considerably less is known about whether or not these programs improve intergroup relations skills, increase intergroup communications competence, and decrease intergroup conflicts. The effects of these programs on the institutions in which they are conducted should also be examined. . . . In addition, a broader range of long-term effects of these programs should be studied.”

Consideration of practitioners (including the impact of their contribution, role and identity) is also frequently absent from the available literature, despite new research which indicates that how practitioner manages the process and their own identity is crucial (Orton, 2008). For example, given that contact theory emphasises the need for equal status contact, and that practitioners cannot by themselves cannot solve structural inequality before bringing groups together, to what extent should practitioners trying to bring different groups together acknowledge structural patterns of inequality in the process, and how? Also, in the process, to what extent might aspects of the practitioner’s own identity influence this process of bringing groups together? For example, what impact might the identity of a worker who is relatively young, white, Christian, etc. have if this worker is engaged in bringing together groups who don’t share these characteristics? Can the worker manage this impact and still facilitate effective cross-community interactions in these circumstances, and if so, how? Initial evidence from small events in the North East where such questions were considered anecdotally indicates that some workers are able to use their own identity effectively in challenging prejudice and brokering cross-community interactions, whereas others found this difficult (Damm, 2007). However, such questions would benefit from more thorough consideration.

## Summary and conclusion based on this literature

### **Barriers which restrict cross-community interaction**

This introduction to the literature available on cross-community interactions has shown how there are significant barriers to cross-community interaction within the contemporary English context. Physical segregation remains a barrier to interaction, but even when groups are co-located, people can live ‘parallel lives’ where they still don’t interact with each other. Indeed, just locating diverse groups together without encouraging interaction can exacerbate difficulties in relationships and trust, with particular groups often becoming scapegoats for the resulting difficulties. Underlying these concerns are difficulties in identifying a basis for shared identities and interactions (eg establishing common values) as well as difficulties in addressing the embedded social exclusion of particular groups. There are complex patterns of association between different socio-economic characteristics

and levels of social trust/participation, including significant differences between groups based on age, family/household composition, tenure, length of residence and the extent of deprivation in the surrounding area. Prejudice, discrimination and structural inequalities can combine with a lack of opportunities and places for meaningful interaction to occur, perpetuating poor relationships between different groups. In these circumstances, social conflict between groups is increasingly likely to occur. When conflict does arise in these situations, people are less likely to have the strong relationships and other means which might help to defuse the resulting tensions.

### **Crucial factors for enabling cross-community interactions**

The literature and research evidence which is available, when combined, seems to suggest that at least five factors are crucial to consider in enabling cross-community interactions in response to this challenging context:

1. The need for shared spaces in which diverse individuals and groups may encounter each other.
2. The creation of opportunities for meaningful interaction to take place between these diverse individuals and groups.
3. These interactions require both recognition of those things which people share in common (eg aspects of identities, shared interests, etc.), *and* those things where they might differ. The shared factors can act as a springboard for building better relationships which allow differences to be explored and enable them to work together to improve their circumstances. The resulting relationships are thus more robust than ones built solely on what is shared in common. They also leave space for listening to the different experiences and perspectives of groups where these don't necessarily fit with those of the powerful or the majority. In doing this, it is crucial that people are supported in identifying for themselves what (out of all the possible shared aspects of their identities) are the most important factors which have the potential to bring them together in their particular context. Such factors cannot be pre-determined for them by government or an outside agency.
4. Taking into account that the likelihood and character of any interaction will be affected by (i) the different predispositions, cultures, attitudes, stereotypes, prejudices, worldviews, and levels of openness to learning of those involved; and (ii) the structural factors and inequalities involved.
5. The potential impact and contribution of community groups and community workers in creating factors 1 and 2, and managing factors 3 and 4, so that people can learn from the differences involved.

# Chapter 5

## Taking This Work Forward

### The focus and approach of this research

As this consideration of available literature has shown, there remain some contentious issues within this work which would benefit from further research. In particular, the existing research cited is highly limited in the extent to which it takes into account the experience of practitioners, in order to draw on their everyday expertise and knowledge of running community activities in which cross-community interactions naturally take place. Given this potential contribution by community groups and workers, and the contentious issues and barriers that they face in trying to enable meaningful interactions between individuals and groups, the National Community Forum decided to undertake research to explore their perspectives on this work.

The aim of this research was to tap the expertise of practitioners to explore the issues which help and hinder them in their everyday work building cross-community interactions. The objectives of the research were designed to begin exploring answers to significant related questions that arise naturally out of the evidence base cited above, including:

- How do we build relationships and meaningful interactions across diverse communities? (This could encompass the debates over commonalities and different aspects of identity, shared and separate spaces, etc)
- What factors/issues/barriers help or hinder this process?
- What is the role of community work organisations in this? (including the intra-associational/inter-associational and formal/informal dynamics highlighted above)
- What is the role of the community work practitioner in this process? (including how can they best manage their own identities within this process)
- What could other organisations (including government agencies and related policies) do to support this activity better?

## Methodology and methods

To explore these questions in greater depth, a qualitative research strategy was employed based on an action research process<sup>16</sup> based around an interactive event held on 12 June 2008.

This event brought together 28 practitioners and community members from diverse communities who had been identified by National Community Forum members as having had extensive experience of bringing together diverse groups and individuals within local communities. These included members of the National Community Forum who had been reflecting on these issues as part of their prioritised work plan for the year to provide advice to the Department for Communities and Local Government on this topic, and additional practitioners from across the country identified by Forum Members. The wide range of experience and expertise brought by these practitioners is summarised in Appendix A.

Together, these participants formed a purposive sample selected on the basis of their potential contribution to the issues at hand as selected (a) in the case of the Forum members, through a rigorous public appointment process in terms of their grassroots experience from diverse areas across the country and collective ability to ‘tell it like it is’ to Government; (b) in the case of other participants, through Forum members being aware of their work in particular local areas and making suggestions of potential participants to the researcher, who then selected from these based on the brief descriptions provided to ensure that a wide range of different areas and types of work were present on the day. In addition, the event was chaired by Graham Brownlee (the Chair of the National Community Forum), and attended by June Mason, Reannan Rottier and David Anderson from the Department for Communities and Local Government. During the afternoon session, key points arising from the discussions so far were presented to Parmjit Dhanda, the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State with responsibility for cohesion.

The programme for the day was based around an interactive process which collected and refined the experiences of the participants by encouraging them to share their own perspectives and enter into constructive dialogue and critique with others’ perspectives. In doing this, as well as collecting individual perspectives, the programme was designed to assist practitioners to reflect more generally on ‘what works’ in enabling cross-community interactions to take place. This process was facilitated by Ben Messer, and was viewed very positively by the participants; for example, one of the working groups during the day concluded that:

*“This conference should be regarded as a model for wider societal participation, dialogue, listening, learning and healthy interaction.”*

<sup>16</sup> For greater detail on action research as a methodological framework, see McNiff and Whitehead (2002) and Stringer (1999).

Another participant commented that “this event has been excellent to realise that I’m not on my own tackling these issues”, highlighting the general degree of consensus which emerged from the discussions during the day.

Internal validity was assured using a number of strategies, including the presence of four experienced researchers at the event recording comments which were later cross-verified with each other and the many pages of written comments directly recorded by practitioners on flip-chart paper and sticky notes during the process. A draft of the final report containing the findings was checked with the National Community Forum members who attended to verify this still further. Furthermore, findings from a separate additional event; a workshop on Meaningful Interaction on Monday 30 June 2008, organised by DCLG with another set of bodies involved in similar work largely reflected similar findings, providing an independent triangulation of these results. Forty participants attended this event (including government officials, representatives of national voluntary organisations, trade unions and local authorities).

The following section presents the findings from the event. These were collated based on a thematic analysis of the issues raised by participants and recorded on the day. To illustrate the general points made, quotes are presented alongside the main analysis, with a brief description of the role of the person quoted to set the quote in context whilst maintaining anonymity in terms of who contributed each particular quote. Where necessary, to ensure that these quotes make sense, clarifications have been added within square brackets.

## Chapter 6

### Analysis of Findings from the Event

The findings that will now be presented begin by highlighting participants' perspectives on the current state of interaction within local areas, before drawing on some of the activities that practitioners are using to bring different groups and individuals together. Having done this, the findings then consider why participants concluded that particular activities worked or didn't work in different contexts. Building on this, the findings consider obstacles that were commonly being encountered which were preventing the developing and sustaining of interaction activities. These will then be used to consider implications and recommendations for those wishing to be involved in running or supporting this work, whether from a policy or practice perspective.

#### The extent and importance of interaction

In line with the literature summarised above, participants highlighted the importance of informal everyday individual interaction and the need for people to share experiences in common at a local level.

Ideally, good interaction was seen as being where different individuals mixed and conversed with each other in a natural way through relationships formed in everyday contexts such as the local shop, supermarket, pub, and at the school gate; for example:

*"Children playing together. Mums talking at school gates and in shops. Get the basics right!"*

(Chair of Resident Board)

Another participant described these encounters as:

*"the oils of everyday relationships."*

(Chair of a local action group and a school governor)

These relationships enable social interaction and the formation of informal support networks. They also create a capacity within communities to talk about (rather than ignore) issues, divisions and conflicts within the community. This capacity was seen as essential if difficult issues were to be acknowledged and addressed over the longer term.

However, the development of these relationships was considered to be facing substantial difficulties in many of the participants' own areas. Indeed, a perceived lack of interaction was seen as a nationwide issue, although the precise dynamics of the difficulties appeared to differ significantly in different places. Because of this, participants emphasised the importance of having local knowledge and the need to understand the dynamics in a particular local area before trying to stimulate greater interaction. For example, one participant used these differences between areas as a focus for his work by getting people within local communities to reflect their experiences in different forms of media. He wrote of:

“[the need] to be and have a multi-directional approach and not to be nationally focussed on agendas. Deal with situations territorially and not always statistic-based. Every region is different and not like what it says on Sky News.”

## The importance of locally-rooted activists and organised activities which can bring people together

In this context, there is a crucial role played by locally-rooted activists who endeavour to build bridges between diverse local groups. This role is particularly important where interaction isn't happening, or where interaction is problematic. However, it is also important in supporting other areas where activities are contributing to maintaining positive interactions. Some of this work is directly about challenging perceptions and stereotypes. Other work is focused more generally on building community through common activities and concerns, creating greater interaction between diverse individuals and groups in the process.

One example of this latter type of activity was a community event that had been organised in a local city park by a group of residents with the support of a more experienced activist. Whilst this event may have been seen by some as being “very amateurish”, the group came to describe it as “what seemed like serious community work”. The event was open to all and involved a traditional set of games and picnic in the local park, including egg and spoon race, sack races and sports games. To publicise it, they leafleted every house surrounding the park, deliberately describing the organisers as ‘Friends of the Park’. This made it open to all and non-exclusive, aiming to treat everyone equally. As a result, the event was a fantastic success, including representatives from all the local communities – sons and fathers, mothers and daughters:

“We were just inundated with people from every part of the community who came out because there was sunshine. ... The only problem was that the ice cream van didn't come because he wouldn't drive through [our notorious area]! ... The reason this day worked was that it wasn't addressing a 'problem' – there wasn't one to address – it was simply encouraging neighbours to use local public space in the sunshine.”

Other examples of activities mentioned during the day which were seen as positively contributing to cross-community interactions include those listed in List A below.

**List A: Examples of specific activities organised by practitioners which have contributed to cross-community interaction in their area**

During the course of the day, participants described a wide range of community activities and events which had worked effectively in their area. These included:

- A local residents' association arranging for welcome parties to greet newcomers to the area and help them to feel welcome.
- Events designed to encourage intergenerational contact, including holding tea-dances, shared history trips to back-to-back slum houses by older people with school children, and even 'back to school' days and break-dancing classes for older people!
- Building on work within schools and young people's own suggestions, creating a multi-faith band of young people who used music to spread their message by playing in places of worship and engage with communities in these places of worship. The young people came up with a name for their tune, which was 'Open Minded'. The worker described how "We played in a synagogue ... which allowed us to bring in so many faiths. It was very significant that Muslims were in the synagogue. The rabbi allowed Muslims to use his office to pray in there." To be successful, this worker claimed that "it's about giving them the space and opportunity to be creative".
- In another city, young people produced a CD and distributed it to young people in other areas so that they can listen to it and what the lyrics are saying about unity and stopping the conflict between the areas. They also organised 'Hot Prospects' parties which encourage young people from the three areas to come together to showcase their talents.
- In a different city where there was little communal activity taking place, street parties and street cleaning projects linked to incentives for residents have gradually changed perceptions amongst residents. For example, with planting, residents asked their neighbours to look after their plants whilst they were away, helping people begin to feel pride in the area. Whilst one event did not change things overnight, a series of sustainable activities started from enabling people to set up an initial point of contact. This led on to street dinners where 300 people have a three course dinner together in the street.
- Many practitioners found that they had to be "creative with funding" to create opportunities for cross-community interaction whilst also meeting other targets. One example given was a group which had obtained money from the Heritage fund to improve basic skills. This group had managed to use the money for working with older people in the Afro-Caribbean community to educate the young people about their heritage, building basic skills in the process.



- Other areas had focused on using groups of local business people to give opportunities to people who live in particular postcode areas that are not otherwise well regarded by employers. The group also runs awareness raising events and customised training programmes that fit the people and the jobs that are available in the area. In still other areas, leadership development courses have been developed to offer learning on topics such as communication, development, funding and change. As part of this process of encouraging new people to get involved in leading activities, participants are given a buddy who is already involved and able to offer support, creating opportunities to develop skills and access opportunities for young people in particular.
- Other suggestions included using community TV and radio, training young people to undertake peer research to build a vision with the wider community, organising community lunches and trips, organising discussion events based around sharing experiences that a wide range of people have in common (eg having had parents), and organising street advocates.

### Adapting activities to the local context

However, despite this impressive list of potential activities, it was clear that not all activities worked equally well in all areas. Indeed, activities which were helpful in some areas had the potential to be divisive in others. The difference depended on both the local context and the way in which the activities were ran. For example, one project had tackled issues of territorialism with young people by getting each area to host football matches in turn:

“Football can bring people together, but if not planned/organised properly can also be very divisive and trigger conflict; ie passions can get high during [the] game and physical contact/altercations during [the] game can easily lead to confrontations and fists [which] could increase the ‘them and us’ divide. Done properly, [this needs: an] assessment whether the two groups are ready to compete, ie no recent scores to settle; preparation work with both groups; [seeing] football [as] part of a wider intervention; staff/volunteers/spectators who support teams [and] encourage positive attitudes, not just about thrashing your opponent on the pitch.”

(Youth Worker, written comment)

Participants emphasised the need for practitioners to take reasonable risks to try out ideas that might work best in their area and with the groups they are working with, rather than just copying an idea from somewhere else. For example, one worker from an inner city area affected by gang crime was recorded as commenting:

“You must look at how the community want you to work. The mums open the [community] centre till 1am on Friday because the kids are being shot, whereas Sure Start wouldn’t give us the keys to the[ir] centre. You have to take risks – there’s too much red tape.”

(Group discussion notes)

This was echoed by an earlier written comment from a creative practitioner, who saw creating opportunities for innovation and involving new people as a crucial 'hot topic' which needed further consideration. He recommended:

*"Not going through the 'same old routine'. Do something different and within reason/limits. Take a chance if the person is passionate then channel his/her dream/goal/ambition."*

The important thing is to ensure that activities include the possibility of honesty, sharing, building skills, fun, building on shared experiences, recognising the need for everyone to have a sense of belonging and a chance to be heard. A process of relationship-building is central to this, but practitioners and sponsors should be aware that this can take significant time to build up. For example, developing the 5-a-side football activities discussed above so that they can contribute successfully to cross-community interaction has meant building them up slowly over nine years, rather than just trying to do a one-off event.

## Unpacking the obstacles to interaction – why are people not interacting?

As these comments have begun to show, if activities are going to be used which will work in a particular area, practitioners and others supporting this activity need to understand some of the significant obstacles which can inhibit interaction. Participants in the event highlighted several significant barriers to people getting involved in interaction which need greater understanding if meaningful interactions are to be developed.

### **Obstacle 1: People's comfort in their existing relationships and lack of time**

Practitioners attempting to promote cross-community interaction recognised that this work was frequently inhibited by people's natural tendency to be most comfortable relating to people who they already knew, and with whom they already felt some affinity. As one practitioner stated:

*"It's difficult when we try to bring people together; people prefer to interact with their own."*

One manager of a community project noted that even community workers aren't immune from this tendency in their personal lives:

*"Outside work, I will socialise with people I know best, who I'm comfortable with."*

This is exacerbated by the pressures of work commitments which can leave limited time for people to even engage with those who they want to spend time with, such as their own immediate families. For example, one practitioner noted how he barely felt he had sufficient time to spend with his wife and daughter after work, let alone get to know new people in his area.

## **Obstacle 2: The role of fear in inhibiting interaction**

The difficulty with this very limited form of interaction is that (where this is the only form of interaction within an area) it can contribute to the problems and issues faced by that community by creating significant potential for the growth of fear between individuals and groups. This fear can take a number of forms:

### ***(i) Fear of the stereotyped other as conveyed by the media or prejudiced interest groups (eg the BNP), without people having any of their own first hand experience***

In a situation where everyday interaction across difference was not taking place, there are no natural opportunities for these growing fears to be counter-balanced by real encounters with other individuals and groups. Without these experiences of encounter, there is little opportunity for people's growing negative (if often ill-founded) stereotypes of each other to be challenged.

In this context, one of the biggest factors promoting fear between individuals, groups or areas based on these stereotypes was seen as being the media. A wide range of participants recognised that "the influence the media has is incredible", and expressed concerns that this influence generally had a negative effect in discouraging cross-community interactions. "Negative press images" and "bad news/press which [needlessly] distinguish cultures/religions/backgrounds" were seen as significant contributing factors. Some participants even went so far as to claim people were "indoctrinated" by the media, or claim that the media's role in "highlighting issues can give a vibe of insecurity and give the wrong people a backing".

This effect was seen as being equally harmful against particular groups (eg Muslims) and particular areas. For example, one regeneration worker described how television programmes such as 'The Bill' and 'Spooks' had used the local estate to film drug-related scenes, with newspapers describing the estate as "hell's waiting room". This was seen as causing damage to local areas, creating an image which created more problems on the estate as a result.

These influences can then be exacerbated by rumour and activism from prejudiced interest groups such as the British National Party to create further discrimination, conflict and boundaries between groups, as well as undermine activities designed to increase interaction. For example, one worker described how 45 pupils had been withdrawn by parents from a mosque visit in one city which was being organised as part of 'Islam Awareness Week' on the day of the planned visit due to fears about 'terrorism' being stirred up locally.

***(ii) Fear of saying what they think (especially in case it is not politically correct)***

In this context, practitioners felt it was essential to proactively challenge pre-conceived perceptions as part of community-building work within an area. As one participant wrote:

*“If there is a problem then we need to get to the root of it. By not tackling the problem, the situation will get out of hand.”*

However, there was a widespread concern that people’s ability to talk about these issues within local areas was severely constrained because they did not feel able to say what they really think. For example, two different experienced facilitators from different areas expressed these concerns in the following ways:

*“People are afraid of expressing their views.”*

*“People are so tied up in what they can’t do and say. ... They actually feel bound up by not knowing [what they can say] so the community doesn’t intend to be exclusive but they don’t know how to ask what they are allowed to say.”*

This is founded on what the first worker described as a “blame culture”, which he considered to be “a culture of fear in any form; eg anyone feeling (often for well founded reasons) that they’ll be condemned for expressing their opinion”.

Other participants echoed these concerns, adding additional concerns about resentment arising from forms of excessive political correctness that appear to undermine the expression of the majority culture (such as local authorities “renaming Christian festivals”). For example, one black activist involved in leading equalities work said that this “just feeds prejudice ... another example of creating a problem before there is one”. Moreover, participants indicated that this has created a culture where people think they are being inclusive because they are using politically correct language, and they can’t see the other ways in which they are being exclusive. Furthermore, they have put up barriers to deeper integration through requiring people to interact in a pre-defined language before people have been able to express how they honestly feel in their own words.

***(iii) Fear of losing their own identity***

Underneath these concerns with language, dialogue and representation, there are some real concerns being expressed within communities about their perceived loss of their own sense of identity. For participants, this applied both within some neighbourhoods, where there was perceived to be a lack of a sense of identity, and within cities and the nation as a whole. For example, one participant claimed that:

*“Being a ‘foreigner’ can make you feel you are in the majority (in London).”*

This particularly applied to resentments that practitioners heard and expressed over perceived challenges to white working class and/or Christian identity, which were often not felt to be recognised within official discourses. Another example that was cited was within communities experiencing regeneration. Here, the renewal of housing stock and the intention of creating more diverse 'mixed communities' can clash with the desire to build on existing social networks to create a genuine sustainable community without losing the identity of long-term residents.

The fears accumulating from the issues identified above then get entangled with debates over multiculturalism and whether difference should be tolerated, accepted, celebrated or assimilated in the public sphere. As one participant claimed, shared values such as respect, love and forgiveness can all be useful tools for community interaction, but instead we frequently experience ignorance, indifference, and toleration. Aspects of identity such as faith can both provide frameworks which promote these values and sometimes work against them.

Ultimately, as one experienced facilitator noted, people's own unique experience and history makes their mindset. As a result, challenging them to try to change them can be perceived as a very personal attack on someone's own identity. By contrast, a more open-ended process of dialogue can open up alternative possibilities. The strength of many of the small-scale initiatives discussed earlier was seen as arising from the opportunities they provided for participants learning from each other. One practitioner involved in inter-faith work helpfully referred to this as a process of creating opportunities for "disguised learning", if practitioners are able to make the most of the opportunities that these initiatives present. Within this process of "disguised learning", individuals who hold prejudiced or extremist views are able to encounter new people and find their views challenged in a low key way that does not threaten their identity further.

#### ***(iv) Fear of conflict or disagreement***

However, when individuals and groups from different backgrounds and experiences are brought together with the intention of creating this dialogue, further difficulties can also arise from a fear of conflict or disagreement. For example, two comments from official attendees indicated that an activity which "involves change and is not supported fully [can lead to] people tak[ing] sides" and a "small scale 'civil war'" as well as "fear of anger" from those participating.

A number of the challenges and dilemmas shared by participants also reflected this theme. For example, one event was described that had been organised to explore and share the religious identity of young people including those with no faith. Whilst the event overall went well, there were two particular related (yet seemingly opposite) challenges involved. The first was some of the young people deliberately 'having a go' at something that they saw to be wrong in another faith. This created a twin danger arising from the fact that

young people (like other participants in activity designed to stimulate cross-community interaction) “may want to talk but they may not be well-informed”, and also that people don’t want to be challenged and so won’t necessarily respect someone else’s point of view. Despite these perceived difficulties, one of the pieces of feedback received after the event was that there was ‘not enough conflict’!

This example highlights a wider set of issues for the practitioners involved in organising cross-community interaction events. Frequently, practitioners agreed that “there is no discussion about disagreements” (as one community centre manager described it), which meant that problems are not explored and resolved. Furthermore, if there is discussion of differences and disagreements, is the point of this discussion debate and/or sharing and learning from each other, and what would the outcome of these be? One practitioner summed up these challenges by asking the question:

“How far can you go in being honest?”

### **Obstacle 3: Poorly-designed interventions**

These problems were seen as being further exacerbated by poorly-designed interventions which were not accessible or appealing to potential participants. One community worker referred to this as the “myth of [being] hard to reach”, and several respondents exclaimed “we’re not hard to reach!” at different points in the day. These respondents generally saw the ‘hard to reach’ label being used as an excuse by service providers to avoid working with particular groups. Often all that was seen as being needed was to provide services that communities need, at the right time, in the right place, and in the right way. For example, one community worker (who was also a single mother living on the same estate where she worked) referred to the way that services tended to shut at 5pm, leaving her little opportunity to interact with other mums. Another community worker said “I have problems with the term hard to reach: they live in houses, [and] go to pubs and shops!” Another worker noted the importance of publicising and promoting activities in the right ways:

“I’ve found that where there is a shared necessity and common interest in regeneration anyone will come together for a community event from whatever background or faith to sort out a problem or dilemma – just so long as the information is out there to communicate it is happening.”

However, as previously discussed, services need to be willing to respond flexibly and take appropriate risks to be more creative in the ways that they connect with local people.

#### **Obstacle 4: Poorly-skilled (or unconvinced) staff**

These difficulties highlighted a further potential obstacle: the workers with the potential to run these projects may not have the skills, character or training needed to deliver work that promotes cross-community interaction. For example, one worker in a community centre was seen as blocking work which might help improve interactions because he “doesn’t want this to happen”, as he “doesn’t see the point of working together”. Another participant suggested that professionals such as teachers may have particular potential to intervene, but teachers have their own stereotypes too, and young people can just glide through without having their attitudes challenged. In contrast to this, some projects discussed had actively trained young people from different areas to promote greater engagement and interaction amongst their peers. One group of young people involved in crime had gone a step further and set up a project to train professionals in how best to work with them, calling the project “We’re not hard to reach – you are!”.

#### **Obstacle 5: “Because they don’t want to!”**

However, even when opportunities for interaction were set up by skilled workers with experience of previously running successful initiatives, it remains difficult to engage those within the community who do not want to interact with those who are different to them. For example, an experienced community cohesion worker wrote:

“Some communities may not want to interact, and is that necessarily a bad thing? Eg non-English speaking elders who just want to interact with the family.”

Notes from another group similarly questioned whether a lack of engagement in cross-community interactions was actually problematic:

“Do we really need a solution to this? We need to find out if people actually want to engage.”

Indeed, the very “notion of getting people to engage” was considered potentially problematic by some participants, as it implied passivity on behalf of community members who were expected to engage with pre-determined agendas on behalf of the worker/sponsoring agency. This was considered likely to put up barriers to engaging potential participants at the outset.

Certainly, as noted above, there was increased potential for conflict and prejudice-based exchanges if those who were most insular and/or prejudiced were brought into direct contact with each other. In addition, if a wide range of means have been adopted to ensure that services are accessible, there was the possibility from a service-delivery point of view that some insular groups may “be close knit enough to have support within their community already so maybe they don’t need interventions.” (Experienced centre manager, paraphrased in small group discussion notes).

Nevertheless, practitioners also expressed a strong concern that much activity designed to promote cross-community interaction only ever worked with those who were already open to it, and hence never impacted on those who most needed it if communities were to become more cohesive overall. For example, one practitioner had worked with local refugee groups to organise a refugee week, with the aim of challenging the prejudice and discrimination that they were experiencing. However, only limited numbers attended. For events like these to be successful, participants felt, they have to reach a wider audience, including those who are prejudiced. For example, the practitioner organising the refugee week had received hate mail in response to her work, leading her to ask the following pertinent question:

*“We always preach to the converted, so how do we reach the cowards who don’t understand what we do with the community?”*

Further dilemmas arose when a wider range of people did attend activities that had been organised by the practitioners to promote interaction, but those attending had not always agreed with the practitioners’ aims in starting the activity. For example, the anti-racist youth football competition described above had led on one occasion to a racist fight breaking out amongst two of the many teams involved. For the organisers, this created a dilemma:

*“Should we throw [the fighting teams] out of the competition or just ignore the dispute?”*

Whilst throwing them out would clearly indicate this behaviour was unacceptable, it also meant that an opportunity would be lost for working with those involved to reduce the likelihood they would fight in future.

***If people don’t want to interact positively, what (if anything) should practitioners do about this?***

All of this debate points to the need to address the question of what (if anything) practitioners should do if people do not wish to have meaningful interaction (or wish to interact in a hostile way) with those who are different to them. Ultimately, as the analysis above has shown, any answer to this question depends on recognising that the reasons people might not interact with others can be complex and multi-faceted. These may include not being open to new experiences, being relatively isolated (eg not leaving home except to go to the shops and perhaps the pub), being scared and fearful (as discussed above), as well as outright ingrained hostility or prejudice against other groups.

This places practitioners (who can’t and wouldn’t want to force people to interact) in the position where they have to go beyond just providing opportunities for interaction. They also have to actively promote the value of interaction. For example, two separate discussion groups noted:



“What is the value of interaction? This poses a big challenge for communities.”

“The question should really be ‘How do we make communities want to interact, or at least feel like they need to interact, and why?’”

There are clear potential benefits for communities that can arise from interaction, as the earlier review of research literature (and the experiences of these practitioners) proves. As one practitioner wrote, nothing is gained and interaction is worsened “when all that happens is that people complain and repeat myths and this is not addressed”.

However, before we can consider potential practical responses to the question of how practitioners can promote positive interactions which extend beyond those who are immediately willing to engage in the opportunities presented, it is first important to consider one final obstacle which impedes this activity, as this also has a bearing on this question.

### **Obstacle 6: The negative impact of funding and political dynamics**

Respondents saw the approaches used to award funding as the single most important contributor (apart from fear) to a lack of interaction between individuals and groups from diverse backgrounds.

There were several inter-connected reasons for this, which will now be discussed.

#### ***Reason 1: Current funding approaches promote competition between groups that are organised around specific identities for access to funds***

The first reason why current funding approaches are detrimental to positive cross-community interaction is that they set different areas and different community groups (organised around specific identities) against each other in order to access funding. Many of the practitioners recognised that the processes used to decide which groups get limited funding caused major friction and conflict between different groups. This in turn militated against them building improved relationships between these groups and areas in the rest of their work. Typical written comments describing factors which limited or made interactions worse included:

“Limited funding – community groups competing for the same ‘pot of money’ (working in isolation and not collectively).”

“Rivalry for resources, premises, grant funding.”

“Community org[anisation]s fighting over small pots of funding because of self preservation.”

For example, one practitioner described how two groups of Somali asylum seekers brought “the problems and tensions that made them asylum seekers in the first place to the estate”. When funds became available to do residents’ community work, this exacerbated differences between the groups, who became major rivals over funding. In a different situation, another practitioner described how they had received European funding, only to find “we have areas complaining why other areas get all the funding”, causing resentments which undermined subsequent interaction between the different estates.

***Reason 2: Current funding approaches don’t tend to fund positive activities which enable interaction unless there is a problem attached***

The second reason why current funding programmes are detrimental to cross-community interaction is that they rarely fund generic, low-level, creative community activities which help people build relationships with others in their area. Instead, they tend to fund activity oriented around a problem or targeted group, which limits the extent to which these activities can link different groups together.

Respondents saw a lack of funding for activities which can specifically promote cross-community interaction as being problematic. For example, one active community member wrote:

“not enough funding towards the projects which connect the communities.”

As another practitioner recognised, the funding that is available tends to be “aimed at one area of the community [and this] can create animosity and widen the barriers to cohesion”. As a result, those practitioners who wanted to organise activity that promoted cross-community interaction had to sign up to non-universal funding agendas which constrained their activity and limited the interaction they could create. For example, two different practitioners were recorded in group discussion notes as saying:

“There is a danger of [activity] becoming selective discrimination – don’t only highlight ‘different families’ but focus on everyone of every group.”

“The establishment creates divisions through funding restrictions placed on services designated exclusively for targeted groups such as single parenting or BME. Targeted group work is important but needs to maintain some openness and wider community focus.”

The consequence of all of this “over-targeted” funding is that it can, in these practitioners’ eyes, contribute to worsening cross-community interaction.

In contrast, practitioners praised funding programmes which offered small amounts of funding that were accessible equally to all community groups and which funded general community activity (such as the activities listed in Table A), as they saw these as contributing positively to cross-community interaction. One example of the type of programme that was positively cited was the recent 'Community Chest' programme.<sup>17</sup>

### ***Reason 3: Current funding approaches exacerbate stereotypes and labelling***

A further problem with this 'over-targeting' of funding is that it can frequently exacerbate existing social divisions by singling out particular groups and requiring people to be labelled (eg as 'deprived' or 'racist') in order to access the funds.

As we've already noted, in some areas, when people have identified a shared problem for themselves, organising around this problem can be an effective way to build relationships in some areas. However, the focus on the negative that is inherent in this approach, when combined with the frequent need to accept another's negative label for one's own area/group in order to access funding, can cause problems and ultimately create new divisions. For example, the discussion notes from one group noted:

*"Isolation does not necessarily mean funding can be gained to encourage cross cultural interaction, only if there is stigma and disadvantage linked to the area."*

This can have a significant effect on the development of those who might otherwise want to become involved in positive activity within their own community. This is because in the process it requires people to label themselves negatively. For example, a Chair of a neighbourhood board wrote how cross-community interaction was made worse in her experience by:

*"10 year old school children applying for funding to improve [their] school playground describing themselves as 'disadvantaged': what chance have they got? This is an obscene mindset to give young children!"*

This can also affect the attitudes of professionals who work with people from these areas, creating further divisions, as one group noted:

*"Councils have their own agenda (often one person's agenda) that has a negative image of an area. How can young people work with this negativity? ... [This is] despite their duty to promote cohesion."*

<sup>17</sup> Whilst the 'Community Chest' programme, funded originally from Neighbourhood Renewal funds, was specifically targeted on deprived areas, it was open to a wide range of different groups within those areas for a wide range of activity, as long as the activity contributed to neighbourhood renewal. Hence, whilst even this programme did contain elements of area-based targeting linked to perceived problems, participants were positive about the connections made within these areas because of the broad range of eligible activities and groups within them.

This can then limit subsequent engagement by those who don't want to accept these labels. For example, one practitioner wrote how many people who might otherwise benefit from cross-community interaction activity would be put off from attending if it was funded from a source which was concerned with 'tackling racism', as they wouldn't want to be labelled 'a racist'. Another set of group notes recorded that:

"Frustration was expressed that applying for funding for "deprived" communities constantly required having to highlight (even over-exaggerate?) the negatives and detrimental aspects of a community to tick boxes for successful applications. This can lead to a cycle of self-depreciation which filters in to human psyche of those living on the estate."

Even processes which required the recording of personal information to satisfy funders were seen as contributing toward excluding people who might otherwise participate. For example, one worker supporting a wide range of families was noted as commenting that she:

"does not like funders who make them label people and this means that as part of their work they are forced to ask questions which label people ie are you unemployed/on benefits."

This can undermine the ability of these workers to build professional relationships with people within communities because it forces them to ask questions which invoke labels at an early stage in an intervention, rather than treating people as individual human beings. This labelling process can also combine with the negative media role discussed earlier to exacerbate fearful relationships between groups and ground down an area or group's self confidence and image, making negative interactions more likely.

Practitioners and residents frequently engaged in a wide range of activities to try to circumvent these negative effects. One example of this was categorising all children on a particular estate as 'at danger of offending' rather than singling out particular individuals (so that no children in the area are excluded from activities).<sup>18</sup> Another example was deliberately mixing groups of children from different classes, as they have found that this raises their aspirations. Several respondents also noted the need to "celebrate achievements" and "celebrate diversities", including getting various forms of media involved in sending out positive stories about local people and the local area. Where possible, it was suggested that greater involvement of councillors and using community radio and TV could also assist in this process.

<sup>18</sup> Again, this works to reduce stigmatisation within the area, and in the process avoids the problem of targeting services mainly at those individuals who are perceived as problematic, which can otherwise create a perverse incentive for young people to present as likely to offend in order to gain support. However, it can exacerbate wider stereotypes and stigmatisation of the area (and young people who live in it) as a whole, potentially contributing to limiting cross-community interactions across different areas.

#### ***Reason 4: Current funding approaches can lead to groups being excluded from services***

A further problem identified with current funding approaches was that they can sometimes lead to separate service provision or perceived preferential treatment for particular groups (eg based on cultural or faith grounds). This may have “a detrimental effect on community relations through the exclusion of other groups”. Several practitioners from diverse settings commented how the allocation of funding to separate groups contributed to division and worsening interactions within their area. For example:

“Creating ‘single group’ services or resources which can cause resentment and further divisions [because of perceived preferential treatment] – acceptable apartheid.”

“Divisive funding streams splits communities and their aspirations.”

“Services that separate the community; ie targeted services only for lone/unemployed persons can create a feeling of ‘why do I bother’ which I find a lot in my community. The ‘offers’ of support are only given to those who are targeted and others feel sometimes forgotten.”

However, these written comments were perhaps the most controversial comments in the entire event, and generated substantial discussion both at the time and in the later discussion groups. Participants recognised that work with single groups was often necessary as a pre-requisite for ultimately bringing them together. In addition, some thought that “cutting funding for ‘single groups’, many of whom help most disadvantaged (eg newly arrived)” would worsen interaction. There was generally an acceptance that specific services should be available that addressed particular needs which may be principally necessary for one group. Whilst this did mean that it does make sense to provide these services in a targeted way, this does not necessarily mean that it has to make them exclusive. For example, some groups of people may be more likely to specifically need help with their English, and hence it could be helpful to target publicity for basic English courses with these groups in mind, without necessarily restricting those who may attend the group.

However, there is a danger that this could become a form of indirect discrimination. For some participants, this orienting of provision around particular characteristics can be considered exclusive by those that don’t share them. For example, another resident who was white described how she had looked for a local writers group as a way of mixing with the community when she arrived to live in a new area, but all she could find were Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) women’s writing groups and she wasn’t allowed to join them. Her children also weren’t welcome at the youth club on the corner of their street. Another example was when her white daughter desperately needed housing benefits advice one day but when she rang up, the council refused to see her because it was “BME day” –

serving exclusively those who from BME backgrounds who might otherwise feel excluded from accessing the service. When her daughter said “Can I send my husband who is black along then?” they agreed to sort out the problem immediately. In these situations, the group that was discussing this felt that all that was required was for service providers to be more aware of how creating separate provision could be exclusive, and rather than not running separate provision, instead ensure that they at least kept one office open for all regular service users at the same time.

Ultimately, every individual is made up of a range of different characteristics (eg gender, ethnicity, etc.), and provision oriented around one characteristic may actually provide opportunities for interaction across other characteristics. For example, one resident described how Bangladeshi women in her housing block applied for some money to set up a fitness class for themselves but they found that the easiest way of sustaining the service was to open it to other women who were keen to come. The generic women’s fitness class is still going strong and is very popular.

#### ***Reason 5: Current funding approaches are too short term***

A fifth reason why current funding approaches are problematic for developing meaningful cross-community interaction is that funding awards tend to be short term and often expect you to make progress quickly. In practice, this can undermine the long term process and commitment required to make real progress in challenging ingrained attitudes and patterns of behaviour.

Practitioners recognised that many of the issues they were tackling were linked to wider changes in the communities around them which were longer term, and hence their work had to be a long-term project. However, the short-term nature of most funding programmes meant that practitioners were frequently unable to continue work for the length of time necessary to change attitudes. For example, one community centre manager wrote that “target driven” funding and funding “time frames” worsened interactions in her area because:

*“creating shifts in cultural and sub-cultural values and beliefs takes time, usually longer than funding permits.”*

At its worst, these time frames can actually make interaction worse, because it is not possible to spend sufficient time at the outset building the relationships that are necessary to affect real change. For example, one worker involved in faith-related cohesion work was noted as describing how:

*“In our area [a particular] pathfinder project happened very quickly and we suddenly got £200k for the first year to tackle radicalisation, which came up very quickly because of national time pressures. We ended up with other faith communities feeling left out and the Muslim community split over the issue. The projects themselves are excellent but [the process has] changed the environment we operate in [for the worst].”*

At best, unless practitioners manage to find some way of integrating their work into a longer strategy (see below), short-term funding can mean that there are:

“too many one off events with no funding for follow up/continuation. The event is ok but no long term difference [is made].”

(Written comment from experienced convenor of multi-faith work, with widespread agreement)

In fact, practitioners indicated that in their experience, there is a real risk that can arise from various stakeholders not managing the expectations that projects can raise in this context. For example, two practitioners involved in inter-faith work commented that things that can worsen interactions in an area are:

“Promising too much and not delivering: ‘we will do this in our community and not doing it’. This can be what the council, public bodies and community groups do.”

“Workers (me) over reach in aspiration and vision with people trusting me. [As a result, participants] are more likely to blame the other party for the lack of fulfilment, raising barriers rather than see[ing] the shortfall as mine.”

Various steps could be taken to improve this situation, including consciously undertaking more gradual work, taking realistic steps, and developing good links with partner agencies who understand the long term nature of the work.

### ***Reason 6: Meaningful interaction is difficult to demonstrate in terms of quantifiable impact***

For many of the practitioners, familiar problems with measuring, quantifying and demonstrating the impact of their work were particularly difficult to overcome in a meaningful way for cross-community interaction activity. For example, one practitioner who also advised local statutory agencies on community cohesion commented:

“You can measure [some things, such as the number of attendees,] but we don’t measure the depth of interactions. In small events you may build more depth of engagement than one sit down conference of 300 people.”

Another practitioner, who had been involved in getting young people of different faiths to play music together in places of worship, commented:

“How do you quantify the feeling that I hope people have when then have attended one of our events?”

Given these difficulties in measuring ‘what really matters’, some practitioners criticised the distraction provided by the “red tape” and constant pressure to:

“describe it, evidence it, just write it down. All you think about when you’re doing this [work] is the outputs.”

Other practitioners recognised the need for finding some way of evidencing the effectiveness of their work, but found great difficulties in finding a way that captures this effectively.

### ***Reason 7: Funding decisions often symbolise wider political concerns***

There is one final reason that participants identified with current funding approaches that caused them to have a negative impact on the development of meaningful cross-community interaction. This is the way that funding decisions tend to symbolise a range of wider concerns about political issues that also inhibit cross-community interactions, such as how seriously different groups’ perspectives are taken into account.

A range of widely-supported written comments from participants indicated that a lack of genuine consultation with local people contributed towards worsening cross-community interaction. These included:

“shallow consultation/engagement by vol[untary]/stat[utory] orgs. Raises cynicism to value of worker/org[anisation]s leads to focus on self as defensive/hurt reaction.”

“decisions being made without genuine consultation with local people.”

“consultations which have set aims, don’t give the opportunity for comprehensive discussion and have no pre-advised feedback arrangement.”

Furthermore, there was a concern that top-down processes were imposing “structures that hinder participation at a strategic level” and which inhibited honest dialogue amongst the participants, who can “get sucked into organisational politics and internal battles”.

This was exacerbated by the challenge of co-ordinating with the multiple other top-down agendas of different public agencies. For example, one local resident involved in running a community project described how she got approached regularly by agencies wanting their project to help them achieve their agenda. However, she had to reply “we don’t have the resources [because] there are so many agendas out there”. Even responding to a week of action every three months when different areas in the city were targeted by agencies involved in crime and disorder reduction partnerships “causes pressure because you’re expected to work to that agenda”.



This was seen as being a particular issue for funding that was distributed via local government. This is because, in participants' experience, the involvement of local government had often led to this money getting "caught up in local politics and personalities". This can then lead to political manoeuvring, such as councillors or officers coupling funding with political concessions to particular communities. This can be detrimental to cross-community interactions because it "destroys the concept of a fair and open playing field for all groups". Other examples of political issues generally seen as having a negative effect were "When political agendas take over the community fears" and "political parties [engage in] scapegoating and scaremongering via myths to obtain votes/support".

These political concerns were connected more generally with the recognition that many organised initiatives included some degree of tokenism and/or ignoring of issues that were important to individuals and groups within local communities. For example, one practitioner described how they had met with the chief executive of their local council. During this meeting, he was asked to present a plan at the next meeting to show how in one year there would be an interfaith network with one voice for all faith groups to take part within decision-making processes. This worker then had to explain that this wouldn't happen, as it would take so much longer and may be impossible to get one person to represent such a diverse set of people.

Several different activists noted that these initiatives at best had little effect, and at worst actively made interaction worse. For example, those activities which were seen as having little effect included "dialogues which try to impose pre-set actions and don't really listen to participants" and "token projects [involving the] usual suspects". The latter particularly included "outside organisations [who] provide 'short term' projects [in which the] usual suspects take part and it does nothing for the majority [of the] community".

Another practitioner noted (with widespread support) that activities which had little effect included those "when real issues are ignored or swept under the carpet as nothing changes so people don't behave differently afterwards". This was because:

"by not validating local issues raised by different communities and 'sweeping' it under the carpet it does not get rid of the issue but allows it to grow and worsen. There must be outlets to discuss perceptions, misconceptions. There must be mediation in local communities."

This reflected a more general concern with large/one-off events which only achieve a superficial level and depth of engagement, and which were seen by many of the participants as having little effect:

"large community events without focused interaction, these lead to shallow interaction and can harden/set the superficial interaction experience making it harder for them to foster deeper engagement."

“one off events may have some limited impact or more significant impact on a few individuals – but I don’t get the sense there’s any big or lasting impact on the community = perhaps cause the counter forces are so strong and omnipresent.”

“community events organised by large bodies (council, police) with diverse communities [have little effect]; it is inevitable only a few will be targeted for numbers, [so] others will feel resentment.”

“activities which have been led by workers and [which have] not included people from the communities they are aiming to support [in] interact[ing have little effect].”

Other participants indicated that those events which had little effect were those which involved “talk v no do” and “interaction with no purpose [because] it will not sustain” itself.

Ultimately, all of these funding and politically-related concerns were summarised by one written comment which stated that a crucial factor in determining the likelihood of cross-community interaction was:

“money and its distribution, who pulls the strings? EQUALITY and how it is being shown.”

### **Obstacle 7: Wider structural and cultural factors**

These funding and political factors begin to highlight a wider set of structural and cultural factors which also present a significant obstacle to meaningful cross-community interaction. These factors can exacerbate fears within particular areas and create a context where these interactions tend to become increasingly negative.

Examples of these wider structural and cultural factors cited by participants included:

- (i) The development of territorialist attitudes feeding hostile rivalry between areas/groups, especially when linked to a gang culture based on these attitudes.
- (ii) The detrimental effects on everyone when groups of people (eg asylum seekers) with particular needs are relocated to deprived areas with little support, especially when people in the area (due to ignorance) did not have knowledge about these new people in the area.
- (iii) Poor community relationships with service providers, and poor quality public services (such as education and housing) to a particular area, limiting the effectiveness of any attempts to improve interaction. The quality of the physical environment was also important in creating shared community pride and opportunities for safe interaction. For example, one participant noted the importance of “good physical aspects of neighbourhood residents can feel proud of community (open spaces/urban village feel)”.

- (iv) Segregation based on historical allocation policies for services such as housing or schools. For example, regeneration processes can create obvious physical differences in housing stock, and historical eligibility criteria in housing allocation policies can lead to groups being segregated in particular areas. Whilst participants agreed that segregation was problematic, they were not generally convinced that mixed tenure, schooling, etc. in areas would necessarily help community interaction, unless it was linked to opportunities for shared bodies to discuss shared issues in a positive way within a shared area.
- (v) Broader issues such as class, poverty, resource use, materialism, etc. were also seen as having a continuing impact. As one chair of a multi-agency body responding to the needs of an urban area noted, "poverty, inequality and injustice can cause huge amounts of conflict".

All of these wider factors can lead to a lack of shared spaces and opportunities for interaction. In addition, they echo the important point that even where cross-community interaction does take place, when underpinned by fear, the consequences are unlikely to be positive; as one practitioner stated, without effective support, "mix[ing] doesn't always have positive outcomes".

## Understanding the dynamics which enable interaction

Given all of these complex factors and obstacles which can inhibit positive and meaningful cross-community interaction, what conclusions might be drawn about the dynamics which are necessary to enable greater positive interaction? The responses in the data suggested four key strands of activity which can contribute towards more positive interactions between different individuals and groups:

1. Creating spaces and networks which enable interaction
2. Designing processes which are built on an improved understanding of what enables positive relationships to be built
3. Supporting, training and sustaining community activists who enable these activities to take place and these relational bridges to be built
4. Creating a conducive policy context which supports rather than undermines this work.

Each of these strands of activity will now be considered in turn.

## 1. Creating spaces and networks which enable interaction

### ***Promoting interaction and finding a basis for interaction to take place***

In order to overcome the obstacles to interaction highlighted above, this report has already shown how practitioners within local communities frequently have to play a complex role in enabling interaction. They frequently do this by encouraging people to find shared aspects of their identity, or shared interests and concerns, on which to build the basis for greater interaction. In the process, they have to actively promote reasons for different groups to come together, and ensure that these reasons are widely marketed with details of opportunities which will enable them to take this forward.

### ***Identifying key contact points and bringing them together***

This activity can frequently be supported by making discerning connections with key gatekeepers or leaders within different groups who see the benefits of bringing people together. These people do not necessarily have to be established community leaders, but will be willing to engage across traditional boundaries within facilitated shared spaces.

A range of the practitioners had done this by identifying and successfully enlisting support from key contact people in their areas, and had used this support to good effect alongside more open marketing of their activities. For example, one practitioner suggested:

*“Finding one person who can access a community and get people in the community together in a more informal context. They can then find out if there are issues and if your organisation can help with these.”*

Another group, in discussing making contact with and involving young people, indicated in their notes that there was a:

*“need to get one of the group involved and sometimes others linked to that group will join in. . . . Use people who have relationships with young people to work with them rather than take it all on yourself.”*

The benefit of using this approach alongside other approaches is that certain key people already “have [the] relationships in place” in order to work with people who might otherwise be reluctant to get involved; as one resident community worker put it:

*“It’s about getting key individuals who have a good reputation with their peers and bringing them together and they bring people from their groups.”*

For example, one practitioner highlighted in a group discussion how they had identified that faith leaders were key to engaging in cross-community interaction activity in a particular community, and how they then went about this:

“I worked out who was influential in the community and tried to widen that out. [I] identified that imams and priests were key... they were standing in the middle and knew my face because I kept turning up. I brought the priests together in a room (one imam and five priests) with no agenda. I asked what it is like for them to walk through the town. I also asked if they saw themselves as leaders of a whole community or just their own community. This happened last June and it’s now widened out with others getting involved because they can see something they can trust. Key to this was a small central area, a specific community area which they all had in common and were able to talk about. I’ve now got another group together based on a small local area focused around young people on the streets.”

### ***Developing skills and building leaders***

Thus, a range of people have the potential to become indigenous leaders who will champion greater interaction within their setting. Once individuals or groups have begun to come together, practitioners and emerging community leaders have to use a range of skills to enable groups to learn from each other, and build these skills in others.

Key skills considered necessary, if difficult, for those involved to learn included listening skills. For example, one practitioner who had trained people in active listening skills within a New Deal for Communities project indicated how this training had benefited interaction. This involved “recognising that these skills are hard to learn and maintain but [that they] can enable real potential to engage”. Other skills that were considered important included conflict management skills and an ability to constructively challenge stereotypes and prejudice.

Practitioners saw this process of developing skills as essential in building community leaders who were able to bring individuals and groups together:

“We need to begin to identify people in local communities as emergent leaders and train them. We need a can do attitude and get the people who are new to the community to bring their young people in. It’s important the person themselves comes forward .....we provide an opportunity. It’s about encouraging people.”

(Resident, cited in group notes)

However, as earlier examples have indicated, there is a need to be discerning about this approach, and ask pertinent questions in implementing it, including:

“Is that contact person the right person? Can you find other mechanisms to access the group? There are also issues of personality divisions and dimensions which might affect how you access the group. There are different ways of engaging [others other than just using one contact person].”

(Discussion Group Notes)

This need for discernment highlights the weakness of approaches which rely just on identifying 'key' people, as these can also create problems. Nevertheless, to the extent that these activities attract the right people and help to get them on board, they can be helpful. It is in this way that the one-off events or workshops mentioned earlier may have some merit, as a starting point for making these connections. However, a reliance just on engaging these people can risk being tokenistic and having minimal positive impact, unless it subsequently leads to activities which engage wider communities in interaction too.

## 2. Understanding and designing the process

This highlights the need for all those involved to develop an improved understanding of the processes which help improve interaction, and how practitioners can best design these processes to maximise their likelihood of success. Within these complex processes, practitioners particularly highlighted two key aspects which they considered crucial to successfully building greater positive interaction.

### ***Managing expectations: Relationships are key, but take time to build***

As this report has show, many people do not wish to engage with those who are different to themselves, for a wide range of reasons. By understanding these reasons, opportunities for interaction can be created that take these potential obstacles into account. In doing so, practitioners can go a long way towards encouraging a wide range of people to become involved, including those who may not normally interact with the others concerned.

Within this, the ultimate aim of relationship building and learning from each other remains crucial to the process. However, ultimately, activities designed to improve interaction can only ever aim to support informal collaboration and neighbourhood encounters, not replace them. It is not possible to force people to change their mindsets to become less prejudiced through organised activities, or make them want to interact, especially if they see this as involving them changing their own identity. For example, one experienced facilitator indicated that:

*“The most that you can hope for is that they become tolerant of other people’s mindsets. Workers are too willing to take responsibility but we are limited in what we can really achieve. We can only plant the seed.”*

Nevertheless, this 'planting of the seed' through creating opportunities for dialogue is an important contribution that may lead on to contributions which improve community interaction such as “education, cultural events/social interaction, [and] working together”. In engaging in such activities, people can create new possibilities for identity formation and find new ways of interacting which enable them to build relationships which are less threatening to their own sense of identity. However, if they are to be successful, such activities take time, in order to enable people to engage gradually, at their own pace, to enable this seed to grow in its own time.

### ***Creating learning spaces which challenge stereotypes***

In this context, it is particularly helpful to think about these activities as a form of informal education<sup>19</sup> that is concerned with creating spaces for learning. Practitioners indicated that much of their work, whether through bringing people together or by acting as a broker between groups, involved informally educating people to help different people to understand each other better.

For example, two practitioners working with Muslim groups indicated that they had played a role explaining different religions and cultures to those who didn't share them. One of these practitioners, herself a Muslim, frequently had to explain aspects of Islam such as 'Sharia' and what the Koran says to other people, trying in the process to convey more accurate information than the media. The other practitioner, in her role as a school governor, recounted an example where a Muslim mother had been concerned to ensure that her daughter would have access to changing rooms which were not shared with boys, in order to comply with cultural and religious requirements. This practitioner then explained that boys and girls did have separate changing rooms so that they could change separately, and that this was a general issue affecting others in the community as well, and not just one facing Muslims. In response, the practitioner described how she could almost "see the penny drop" in the mother's face that a problem or dilemma could be faced by multiple groups, not just one's own. In both cases, the group discussing these examples agreed that enabling people to see a broader vision is important.

These learning spaces were seen by practitioners as essential in managing misinformation and challenging stereotypes, in conjunction with the spreading of more general positive messages and facts about different groups to the wider community.

## **3. Supporting, training and sustaining the activists**

### ***The personally-risky nature of enabling cross-community interactions***

Those who tried to get involved in creating these learning spaces did not just face innumerable obstacles in their work. Practitioners also frequently recounted how their involvement in this work was highly risky on a personal level, and had often come at a great personal cost to them.

For example, one practitioner described how she received hate mail after 7/7. She had been running a project with the Abrahamic religions, looking at the theme of 'hope', and had invited an Imam, Rabbi and Priest to the launch of this project to encourage greater dialogue and understanding between members of these different faiths. After leaving, community members had told others not to get involved or let their young people come, as she was "trying to make their children Christians or Jews". As a result, people called her to tell her that she wasn't Muslim, as she was working with Christians and Jews. She also received a hate message on her mobile, telling her to leave the country, as 'all Muslims

<sup>19</sup> For an excellent introduction to a range of relevant informal education theory, see [www.infed.org](http://www.infed.org)

were terrorists'. She told the police, but the harassment continued. The funds for this work, from the Faith Communities Capacity Building Fund, ended in March, but because of her commitment to this work, she continues the work voluntarily in spite of the hostile opposition she has experienced.

Another example was a worker who had regular contact with young people who were involved in gangs. She described the dedication of volunteers in "taking people out of their comfort zone" to engage with others, and as a result how much work was done supporting the "kids that straddle the divide. There are always some people who can move in and out of different communities ... [for example, because they have family in more than one area of town]... but it can get to the stage where it is too dangerous to straddle." In particular, she described one young man who is bringing people together in terms of "the risks he's taken! I mean, for those territories, people kill each other! ... You can end up dead if you are the wrong side of the fence."

As a result, participants indicated in several discussions that identifying the right person to take a lead in bringing communities together was crucial, whether in terms of people within the groups/communities concerned and/or in terms of any worker who might support them. Indeed, several of the respondents offered scathing critiques of "detached community workers" and those frontline workers of statutory authorities who adopted a "doing it for the hell of it approach" to their work, costing significant amounts of money in the process that might be better spent on supporting local people to do this work more effectively. To be successful in doing this work, wherever the workers originated from, participants felt that passionate workers were needed to help shape and implement activity, and these workers must not just 'talk the talk', but instead "must believe in what you preach."

### ***The need to value, support and train those involved***

All of these perspectives highlight the crucial need to value the contributions made by those who bring communities together. In particular, this analysis highlights the need to support these people over the long term and train them in this risky activity. For example, one practitioner indicated that good interactions within their community were supported by having a:

*"Good support network at community area level; community development worker/co-ordinator based within community. This facilitates good communication and information sharing."*

However, support and training were frequently not forthcoming. Even those involved in work that had repeatedly shown its effectiveness frequently reported substantial difficulties in getting the support, recognition and training that they needed. Examples included one practitioner who wanted to get ideas from the event concerning "How to convince local authorities that funding work on interaction is worth doing".



Another practitioner (with extensive experience of cohesion-related work) described how a local authority had refused to recognise the level of skill and difficulty involved in being a link worker responsible for community cohesion work in schools. In implementing this work as part of their duty to promote community cohesion, the local authority had employed several workers, but they had not shared a common job description. When the link workers employed to do this role recognised this, they got together to write a common job description, but the local authority said the level of responsibility within their job description was too high, and would cost too much, and hence refused to accept it.

Even the experienced practitioners attending this research event indicated that they did not have access to sufficient support and quality learning opportunities which addressed the challenges they regularly faced. Without this support, recognition and training, participants highlighted how they and others they knew often operated in isolation, and hence could easily get discouraged. For example, one 'equalities' worker described how she was "saddened" and found it "really demoralising" when people did not get involved in her work, despite their best efforts to make it accessible and attractive to everyone. Another worker initially wrote how they were "exhausted" and felt that they needed to gain new ideas from the day.

Moreover, without training or access to stimulating discussions with others about 'good practice', practitioners may not always help the development of cross-community interactions with the work that they do, despite their good intentions, and they may even hinder the development of good interactions.

This indicates the need for longer-term forms of community infrastructure that can support individual initiatives and activists as they arise, enabling the continuing development and sustaining of opportunities for interaction.

For example, one participant indicated that positive interaction in communities was supported by:

"Positive action, including do-able but sustained effort – [this] can and does have [a] significant impact on cross-community interactions. But there's always the possibility that things will slip back. Therefore [it is] worth thought about what's inherent[ly needed] in community infrastructure to maintain [this work]."

Without such support, the presence of the imposing obstacles highlighted earlier in this report means that the potential for positive interactions generated by community activists is unlikely to be realised or sustained.

#### 4. Creating a conducive context

This analysis also highlights the potential limitations and weaknesses that individual initiatives can face in tackling wider issues such as media stereotypes and funding-induced labelling, as well as the difficulties that practitioners can experience in sustaining their work. In turn, this highlights the need for a strategic approach to this work that builds its potential beyond just generating individual encounters in particular situations.

Practitioners particularly recognised that they needed support in order to be able to spread positive messages more widely and put hard facts out into the local community. Frequently this involves wider public action to create a conducive environment in which people can become involved in interaction activity, such as encouraging groups to “keep chipping away” at prejudice through building relationships with media reporters and distributing positive stories. Wider public action was also seen as being needed to enable people to challenge those within powerful positions who may have a self-interest in maintaining an unjust status quo and/or who are unwilling to embrace diversity.

#### ***Building networks, whilst being aware of complex issues around representation***

In order to achieve a greater impact on the wider context for their work, participants highlighted the need for a better understanding of complex issues of representation within this work.

Questions of representation were considered important to this work in two senses. The first sense which requires consideration is whether it is important to ensure that a full range of people are involved in every initiative that is designed to promote cross-community interaction. As discussed earlier, this includes the dilemmas experienced by practitioners when deciding whether to include those who are most prejudiced.

In response to the question of representation in this sense, participants felt that community events and groups which had used all possible means to make everyone in the community welcome should not be criticised if a particular part of the community is not ‘represented’ within their organising group. This especially included those initiatives that were already ensuring that they were sensitive to different groups within the community and were engaging in appropriate networking and publicity to try to involve others. For example, one chair of a residents’ action group described how she had helped this group organise an event for all strands of the community to attend. However, those organising the event (in this case a group of white, well-intentioned, middle-aged, middle-class women) were not initially representative of all the target communities. In the discussion that followed, the group felt that this did not necessarily lessen the worth of the event, providing that those organising the event had taken appropriate, non-tokenistic steps to ensure that other individuals and groups could join in, and that they were encouraged to be involved in future events that might build on the success of the first one.

Despite this, many of the activists recounted experiences of emotive critiques which had been levelled at those who had been trying to get involved because they were 'not representative enough'.<sup>20</sup> Practitioners had found that this was a disabling argument which disempowers those who are otherwise willing to get involved in starting activity and building initial bridges between groups. Rather than criticising such activists or emergent groups, an alternative approach which was more successful involved seeing these people as key potential protagonists for initiating work that starts with where people are coming from.

For similar reasons, it was recognised that work which involved just working with people from one particular group may be necessary as a pre-requisite to bringing groups together. Here, the community worker is playing an important confidence-building role, helping to resolve internal dynamics and factors with people whilst they are in a safer space. Otherwise, these dynamics might contribute to detrimental interactions with others if they were brought together too soon. For example, one worker with Muslim women explained how she first brings Muslim women together first to talk to each other about cultural differences and similarities to gently bring people out of their comfort zones, reminding them that a lot of conflict is between cultures not religion. She believes that in any group, a necessary prerequisite of interaction is confidence building from within, before launching into engaging with the wider community.

However, within all of this work, if broader issues within a community are to be tackled, then those who are involved in these fledgling initiatives and those who are working within separate spaces may need supporting in their development and encouraged to make connections with others whilst developing their own work. As the earlier example of the Bangladeshi women's fitness group which later expanded to include other women too shows, this can often be in the interests of all the groups involved and help sustain the work. In addition, as the earlier controversies about separate provision demonstrated, by developing closer links with other services, even if there is felt to be a justifiable rationale for retaining separate provision, complementary services can be provided in a co-ordinated way which ensures that no other group feels excessively excluded.

### ***Bringing organisations together***

Unfortunately, this kind of co-ordination of services frequently did not take place. Indeed, the failure of organisations to work together was one of the most significant problems that practitioners identified as contributing to worsening interactions in their area. Several different practitioners from across the country commented on this; for example:

“People in organisations don't work with each other. If we can't get people in organisations to work together, how can we get the people they work with to work together?”

<sup>20</sup> This theme is also reflected in earlier NCF work; see Morris, J. et al (2006) *Removing the Barriers to Community Participation*, London: Institute for Public Policy Research/Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, [www.neighbourhood.gov.uk/publications.asp?did=1770](http://www.neighbourhood.gov.uk/publications.asp?did=1770)

“Community organisations themselves don’t interact enough; this is a dilemma.”

“Lack of communication between community, voluntary and public sector (gate keepers) [makes interactions worse].”

Significant reasons for this included organisational politics that were exacerbated by the funding issues highlighted earlier, as noted in written comments by several different participants:

“Too many organisations in small area ‘competing’ for same ‘clients’ rather than complementing each others’ services and signposting on. [Need for] cohesion between community organisations first?”

“Less of the politics in organisations! It can only filter down through the community.”

“Interest organisations [make interactions worse] when they struggle to see individuals’ and groups’ perspectives and struggles.”

Furthermore, organisations which focused too narrowly on the needs of a very small particular group and did not also consider the bigger picture were seen as having little effect on interactions:

“establishment of too many community org[anisation]s – would perhaps lead to further polarisation within a single community; eg three different Somali/Iraqi/Polish doing the same thing. They would tend to want to use their own methods and it wouldn’t lead to cooperation which then would make no difference to interaction.”

All of this highlights the importance of creating multiple opportunities for relationship building between different groups through supporting generic, low level community activity to happen. This activity can usefully work on several levels, including building broad-based grass-roots community groups and developing coalitions of narrower identity groups that enable relationships to be built between them across all areas. Practitioners gave numerous examples of the ways in which, by working through existing smaller groups, broader coalitions for change could be formed and more co-operative relationships built. For example, in the situation cited earlier where different Somali groups were experiencing negative relationships through becoming rivals for funding, one Somali woman set up a Women’s Network Group which included all of these different groups. This led to tensions between the groups ceasing. Other practitioners highlighted other ideas which had worked in their areas, including setting up a directory of faith-based youth provision in the area, and getting schools to co-ordinate bringing community groups together for annual events such as a carnival. For others, relationships were built around a shared issue such as the environment.

Whatever basis groups organised around, practitioners noted that interaction was fuelled by a shared need or interest, and was developed as a result of sustained good communication from the outset of the process. This process involves retaining a place for both work with individual groups and developing broader networks. These networks enable the groups involved to build their links with each other and find things in common, as well as developing relationships that might help underpin initiatives to bring groups together, whilst also enabling dialogue over differences.

## Chapter 7

# What can be Done to Support, Sustain and Improve the Effectiveness of this Work? A Summary of Recommendations for Policy and Practice

How might the learning from these findings best be summarised? And taking this learning into account, what is needed to overcome the multiple obstacles and enhance the effectiveness of work that enables positive, meaningful cross-community interactions?

The research highlights four key principles which are crucial for enabling interaction, and which underpin the National Community Forum's recommendations for further developing the potential of this work.

### **Principles 1 and 2**

**Spaces, activities and networks need to be created which enable interaction to take place, building on people's diverse layers of identities. However, the way that these spaces, activities and networks are designed is crucial to their potential success, highlighting the need for an improved understanding of the processes which promote interaction.**

### **Recommendation 1**

That practitioners in community and statutory organisations work to create spaces where people can meet in low-key ways, based on aspects of their identities and interests which they hold in common, but which leave them space to explore difference in other respects.

### **Recommendation 2**

That practitioners in community and statutory organisations identify contact points which link groups and play a discerning proactive role in bringing these together, encouraging wider connections between groups without undermining existing connections because they are 'not representative enough'.

### **Recommendation 3**

That DCLG and other research funding bodies consider funding additional research and resources which focus specifically on the skills and processes that practitioners and organisations can use to bring individuals and groups together successfully, to verify, develop and publicise these findings further.

#### Recommendation 4

That statutory agencies in particular provide services and spaces when and where people need them, not just when and where they are convenient to provide. This may mean taking sensible risks with small emerging groups, as well as training core staff and enabling them to use their time to actively promote interaction.

#### Recommendation 5

That funders and statutory agencies, as well as those running these activities, recognise the importance of having positive community activities and spaces used by multiple interacting groups which are not stigmatised by being organised around a problem or restricted to those holding a single aspect of shared identity. Consequently, these agencies and funders should consider whether they can also support activities which bridge across communities whilst promoting positive aspects of them.

#### Recommendation 6

Even where activities are oriented around addressing problematic community relations between particular groups, funders and those running these activities should work together to recognise the long-term nature of any process of change. This will often involve managing expectations of these activities to keep them realistic, so as to enable contact and interaction to be developed gradually over the longer term, as this can ultimately facilitate more meaningful interaction.

#### Principle 3

**Those who are involved in promoting these activities from within particular communities can often face substantial opposition and a high personal cost for their involvement, so they need valuing, supporting, training and sustaining.**

#### Recommendation 7

That existing community groups, infrastructure bodies, and statutory agencies should all work together to identify, encourage, value, support, and offer training to emerging leaders who are trying to bring people together to engage in positive interaction with each other.

#### Recommendation 8

To do this, these bodies should consider resourcing a supportive infrastructure that will offer support to existing and emerging activists and practitioners, including free mentoring, training and opportunities to share with others involved in similar activity, in order to reduce isolation and develop practice.

#### **Principle 4**

**The wider social, political and funding context can have a profound impact on these activities, highlighting the importance of creating a conducive context which supports these interactions, tackles inequalities, and encourages their sustainability.**

#### **Recommendation 9**

That those delivering services are more aware of the potential resentment which can be created from the provision of separate and/or targeted services for particular groups, and strive to encourage complementary delivery so that other groups do not feel that they lose out as a result.

#### **Recommendation 10**

That statutory organisations and other funders consider how to overcome the highlighted ways that current funding approaches can contribute to divisions and be detrimental to developing more positive interactions over the long term. In particular, these bodies should consider providing and/or pooling funds for positive, small scale community activities that address a wide range of different agency targets in an integrated way.

#### **Recommendation 11**

DCLG and other funders should consider undertaking combined quality research into the effectiveness of small-scale community activity in enabling positive meaningful interaction between different individuals and groups. This work could consider how best to measure the effectiveness of such work, rather than requiring each individual practitioner and group to prove the efficacy of their work. This is particularly necessary given the small-scale nature of such work and the need to develop appropriate research methodologies that can capture this effectiveness in a more integrated way.



# Chapter 8

## Conclusion

This report has begun to provide a clearer rationale and much-needed evidence base for supporting the everyday work of those who attempt to build bridges, improve relationships and reduce conflict between diverse groups in society.

Ultimately, these findings highlight how developing improved interactions is a long term, educational and relational process; ie it is an art which requires committed practitioners who are able to draw individuals and groups together to find commonalities and explore differences, whilst managing their own identity and role in the process.

Nevertheless, there is much that wider organisations and policy-makers can do to promote, support or inhibit this work, both directly and in contributing towards the environment in which it takes place. The National Community Forum believes that this is where organisations and policy-makers at local and national levels need to model the positive interaction that they wish to see happen within local communities, by working on these issues together.

# Appendix A

## Full List of Participants<sup>21</sup>

### **Alison Rourke**

Co-ordinator of Positively Inspired Parents in Anfield (PIP's), working with many families and schools in the Anfield area of Liverpool.

### **Amreena Husain-Ali**

Amreena has worked with many organisations in the London borough in Barnet including the Barnet Women's Interfaith Network. This has enabled her to work with different communities to increase social harmony and increase dialogue and understanding. Amreena also worked with the Barnet Muslim Women's Network where her work spans across the different Muslim communities to try and engage women in wider society. She is currently involved in a faith based youth work mapping exercise which will culminate in a directory full of faith based youth work within Barnet among the Jewish, Christian and Muslim communities listing all available youth provision.

### **Andre Schott**

Andre is a founding member and Director of Fitzrovia Youth in Action in central London. Andre has managed a number of projects over ten years that have successfully involved young people in addressing local issues of concern using various models of participation.

### **Chaz Singh**

Chaz has exhibited at London, North Devon and Plymouth as an artist by translating negative statements into positive images and has also designed, developed and delivered workshops to Devon and Cornwall Constabulary regarding faith awareness and stop and search issues.

### **Dawn Munroe**

Dawn runs a community and youth centre in St Anns, Nottingham. She has lived and worked in the area most of her life and has been involved in engaging community members, predominantly young people.

### **Don Liversedge**

Don is a community activist who interacts with many groups in Harrow. He is a member of the community cohesion group, the voluntary sector forum and has experience relating to isolated elderly people.

<sup>21</sup> All participant descriptions relate to their roles at the time of the event in June 2008.

### **Dotun Alade Odumosu**

Dotun is currently the manager of an Outreach Project on the Aylesbury New Deals for Communities regeneration programme in Southwark, London. He is also a member of the Aylesbury New Deals for Communities Board and the Aylesbury Steering Group responsible for the physical regeneration of the Aylesbury Estate. He chairs the Equality Sub Group of the ANDC Board and the Aylesbury Leaseholder Group.

### **Hanan Ally Ibrahim**

Hanan founded the Somali Family Support Group (SFSG), a community organisation serving Somali Families, East Africans, Asylum Seekers and Refugees, in response to her own sense of isolation and lack of support. Her aim was to motivate and assist people with similar problems and help them through training to gain skills relevant to the labour market. SFSG recently received the Queen's Award for Voluntary Service in recognition of the valuable work it has done in supporting disadvantaged and vulnerable members of the community.

### **Hanan Kasmi**

Hanan is the Equalities Coordinator of the Aylesbury New Deal for Communities in the London Borough of Southwark. Hanan has worked with six local refugee groups to organise cultural drama, arts and fashion activities for the wider Aylesbury community to take part in the national Refugee Week.

### **John Martin**

John is a Community Worker for Leasowe community centre on the Wirral and is involved in initiatives aimed at tackling deprivation. John has lived and worked on the Leasowe Estate for 28 years. He is extremely active on the estate, daily involved in local resident issues and regeneration.

### **Kenny Peers**

Worked in the past as an education development worker and a community development worker and has experience of working in disadvantaged communities one of which was the North End of Birkenhead. His work has been very much focussed on breaking down the barriers that stop people from participating as well as supporting small community groups to develop through accessing funding and relevant training.

### **Kyah Alexander**

Young person and member of Fitzrovia Youth in Action in central London. Kyah has been involved in planning and delivering projects that have brought together young people and local adults who live nearby open spaces where young people hang out and where there have been tensions between residents and young people, due to perceived high levels of anti-social behaviour.

### **Lorraine Krimou**

Centre Manager of Leasowe Learning and Wellbeing Centre, a local Women's organisation that has been delivering health related and social inclusion activities to the local community for 18 years.

### **Lyndon Gibson**

Now a consultant, Lyndon has been a community worker and in the past he worked for a BME mentoring organisation where he ran a programme of community dinners, getting people from different background together to discuss together. He has been involved in local community dialogues seeking local solutions.

### **Marc Gardiner**

Marc is resident chair of Devonport Regeneration Community Partnership, a New Deal for Communities programme in Plymouth. Marc is a co-founder of the Zebra Collective, an equal pay workers' co-operative which works with community groups, voluntary sector organisations and statutory providers of health, housing, social care and education services. Zebra offers training, facilitation, consultancy and support services. Marc is currently particularly interested in direct democracy and participation: how can more and more people become actively involved in local governance and the life of their community.

### **Mohammed Nazam**

Mohammed set up Berakah, which is a national arts organisation which is three years old, and which works to bring shared understanding between the Abrahamic faiths by delivering concerts by a multi-faith band in schools and faith community buildings.

### **Paula Walker**

Paula has a huge depth of experience as Chair of a Residents Association and Neighbourhood Forum in Portsmouth. As a member of the SRB Board she was instrumental in driving forward the plans to regenerate the community following extensive local consultation.

### **Paul Matis**

Manager of the Trinity House Community Resource Centre, Moss Side which provides services for children, young people and those who care for them, run by local people in Rusholme and Fallowfield.

### **Paul Singh**

As Integration Officer in the Centre for Equalities and Diversity, Paul has a wealth of experience working with new arrivals and migrant communities and facilitating communications between these communities and the mainstream. He also works very closely with BME communities and white working class communities dispelling myths and stereotypes and helping to bring these communities together.

**Raja Miah**

Youth worker within Fitzrovia Youth in Action in central London. Raja has been involved in planning and delivering projects that have brought together young people and local adults who live nearby open spaces where young people hang out and where there have been tensions between residents and young people, due to perceived high levels of anti-social behaviour.

**Richard Hawthorne**

A community member who volunteers and has a commitment to cross community dialogues/cohesion and is a member of the interfaith council in Nottingham. Richard has chaired the partnership board in an inner city community and is currently involved in developing community dialogues across the Nottingham.

**Ruth Little**

Ruth has worked as a community development worker within Anfield/Breckfield area of Liverpool for many years. She has been involved within the regeneration of her community for the past eight years. She manages a Neighbourhood Council within Anfield and has a dedicated staff team delivering a range of programmes to the community addressing issues such as health, education, parenting programmes, youth and community activities.

**Shaban Siddik**

Shaban is currently involved in the Muslim Youth Forum which seeks to bringing young people from various faith backgrounds closer together. Recently, he has held workshops on religious identity with young people from five different faith and belief groups taking part with very positive feedback. His work involves working with various groups and organization within Harrow's Muslim community to address concerns and dangers of under-achievement and frustration.

**Steff Webber**

Steff has worked within the Third sector for 14 years, in various community settings, rural and urban. Prior to that, she was a social worker with young people for 12 years. She was recruited onto the Nottinghamshire Police Authority board as an independent member and has specific roles in performance scrutiny, community engagement, diversity and professional standards. In addition, she supports the local Development Trust on a short term basis helping develop new projects and fund raising, specifically working with a community centre and looking at developing cohesion projects. Prior to these roles she worked for the Chase Action Group – a community organisation that was based in St Anns, Nottingham.

**Steve Sparrow**

Interfaith Co-ordinator in Dudley at Dudley Interfaith Network. Steve also represents the interfaith network on the community cohesion advisory group for the Dudley LSP.

### **Tracey Phillips**

Tracey is Chair of the Moss Side and Hulme Local Area Group, bringing together residents councillors and health professionals. She brings long experience of community activity, through her involvement with tenants, young people and regeneration projects, and as a school governor.

### **Waqar Ahmed**

Waqar is a founder member of the Green Light Muslim Youth Forum in Dudley, with strong interests in interfaith work, tackling extremism and building community cohesion through partnership between the statutory, voluntary, community and business sectors.

### **Wendy Walsh**

Wendy is a consultant and trainer for Castle Vale Community Housing Association, where she was a founder member and has been Chair. She is a lifelong resident of Castle Vale in Birmingham having seen the highs and lows of how policy and service provision have affected those who live and work there. She has enjoyed promoting the lessons learnt from Castle Vale and now works to support neighbourhoods to bring about improvements. Wendy continues her voluntary work within Castle Vale as a resident Board member of Castle Vale Neighbourhood partnership board championing initiatives for education, jobs and training. She also volunteers for a youth group who deliver activities for young people.

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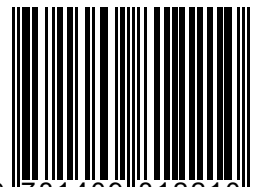
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