
Untold Stories of Good Relations

BUILDING A COALITION OF VOICE AND INFLUENCE



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Introduction

During 2013 346 people attended 11 events across England to talk about their work in strengthening good relations. Altogether 235 organisations were represented, mostly from local community sectors, but also from public and third sector organisations.

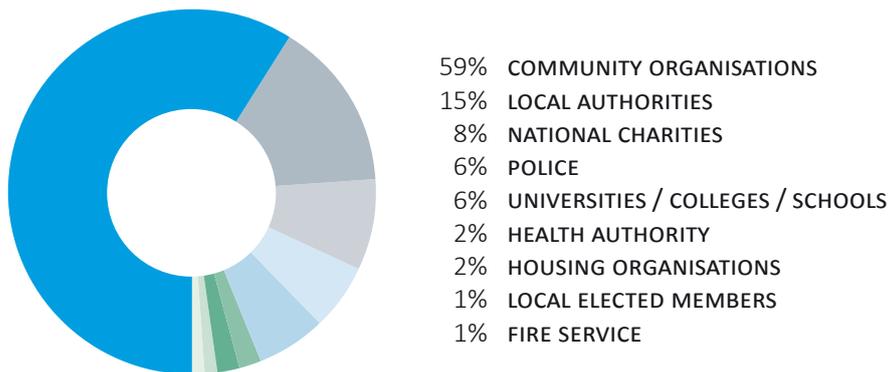
This work was coordinated and supported by Talk for a Change and International Alert who received funding from Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust and Oxfam to build a coalition of voice and influence for good relations work, i.e. work which aims to build more resilient, cohesive and peaceful communities.

Working with local host organisations, events were convened in the following areas:

- Stockwell, London
- Warrington, Cheshire & Merseyside
- Greater Manchester
- Newcastle
- Leeds, Yorkshire and Humber
- Bristol and the south-west
- Newham, East London
- Wolverhampton
- Lincolnshire
- Slough
- Derby

In addition a development group met three times over the year drawing together practitioner organisations and individuals who already had an active interest and expertise in good relations work, to support and influence the project.

DIFFERENT SECTORS REPRESENTED AT GOOD RELATIONS EVENTS



Although we had agreed the focus and a general template for events, local hosts brought their own skills, expertise and particular flair to each one, making it uniquely theirs. All of the events were run in an interactive way, enabling free-flowing discussion whilst addressing the following questions:

- What is the work that you do that contributes to good relations?
- What challenges and issues are you currently facing?
- What methodologies and approaches do you use?
- How do you measure whether or not your work makes a difference to local good relations?
- What kind of support is required? What might a national network or forum provide for you?

Individual event reports are available to download from the Talk for a Change website.

This report describes our overall findings from the project. It examines the different kinds of work that are captured under a 'good relations' heading, and summarises both the challenges to good relations at a local level, and the challenges faced by local organisations and individuals who are working to strengthen good relations. It describes the kind of support that people in local areas would like in order for them to continue to strengthen community relations, and outlines possible next steps.

Background

Our rationale for undertaking this work came out of conversations over a number of years amongst a group of organisations¹ that are addressing tensions and harmful conflict within local areas, using methodologies drawn from international peace-building and conflict transformation approaches. It was also prompted by the findings of Talk for a Change's research into good relations work in 2011-12².

The research found many organisations and individuals committed to developing good relations between and within communities, doing inspiring and groundbreaking work. The authors noted the expertise and experience in facilitating difficult debates and supporting cross-community dialogue in some areas, but also identified areas where these were underdeveloped. They also observed that although there was a fairly small group of specialist practitioners whose main focus was good relations, there was a much larger group of organisations and agencies whose work impacted on good relations at a local level. These organisations had developed specific expertise in a particular aspect of good relations work or were concerned about the need to strengthen relations across difference in local areas.

Given the current challenges and pressures on communities, Talk for a Change, International Alert and others were concerned to find ways to strengthen the voice and influence of good relations work through a programme of events that would:

- Enable skills, knowledge and good practice examples to be disseminated and shared more widely
- Provide a channel for the voices of diverse communities to be heard more clearly
- Highlight the benefits of good relations work and raise its profile
- Share and discuss ideas for developing the voice and influence of good relations work at a national and strategic level

Through these events our aim was to strengthen bridges between practitioners, good relations organisations, researchers, policy makers, public service agencies and civil society so that learning could be shared across different sectors and in order to begin the process of building a broad-based collaborative coalition.



1 Centre for Good Relations (Burnley), Community Resolve (Bristol), Conflict and Change (Newham), International Alert, Talk for a Change, Who is Your Neighbour? (south Yorkshire).

2 Broadwood & Sugden (2012) *We need to talk about...can discussing controversial issues strengthen community relations?* <http://www.talkforachange.co.uk/wp-content/themes/haworth/publications/We%20Need%20To%20Talk%20About.pdf>

What do we mean by good relations work?

In 2011-12 Talk for a Change carried out research into good relations work across England. The resulting report, *We need to talk about...can discussing controversial issues strengthen community relations?* (WNTTA) offered the following broad definition of good relations work:

'...that which aims to build more engaged, resilient and cohesive neighbourhoods. This work could be focused around ethnicity, race or faith. However, it could just as well focus on differences of age, class, geography etc. It means engaging groups and communities in activities that support them to know and understand each other better, to develop voice and agency for change, and awareness and empathy across divides. This may include directly engaging communities and groups in conversations about controversial issues.'

Before we began this project there was some discussion with development group members about whether we needed to offer a more precise definition and, indeed, whether the term 'good relations' was the right one. In the decades since the idea of 'good relations' was enshrined in British law in the 1960s, central government – through programmes such as the Race Equality Councils and Neighbourhood Renewal – has often taken the lead in building capacity in local communities to help them manage change and withstand shock, including the shock of demographic change. Historically, the term has been most associated with relations between different ethnic communities, and with the development of civil society in Northern Ireland. A duty to 'promote good relations' is included in equalities legislation, and all public bodies are currently required to do so. Following the disturbances in Bradford, Oldham and Burnley in 2001, the term 'community cohesion' was coined and in later years broadened to include considerations of class, poverty, age and geography. More recently, terms such as 'intercultural relations', 'social relations', and 'social integration' have all been used to focus research and policy on how different groups and communities get along together.

The challenge was to find a term that everyone understood but that did not bring with it an affiliation to any particular party's policy agenda. We settled on the term 'good relations' because it was straightforward, communicated the desired outcome, and was something that people could bring their own understanding to. We deliberately chose not to offer a definition, instead allowing participants to define the term themselves through their participation in the events.

We gathered information about the activities of those who attended, whilst working with local hosts to ensure that invitations were circulated as widely as possible through a range of local networks.

We found that the work that different organisations were doing that they defined as 'good relations work' fell into a number of categories, with some organisations delivering work across a number of these. Much of the work does relate to strengthening relationships across intersections of ethnicity and faith. However, divides of age, geography, class, wealth and gender were also significant factors. We describe these categories in more detail later on in the report.

The current context: factors influencing good relations across England

Since we began this project in early 2013, there has been a shift in political and media narratives, and a number of debates have become particularly intense. Recent JRF research³ has revealed a hardening of attitudes towards welfare recipients, the Migration Observatory has shown that the word now most associated with 'immigrant' in mainstream media is 'illegal'⁴, and since the murder of Lee Rigby in Woolwich in May 2013 there has been an overall rise in anti-Muslim hate crime⁵.

At the beginning of 2014 when EU labour market restrictions were lifted, the debate about immigration became particularly intense. Some argue that the current debate is necessary, and that politicians and sections of the media are only now catching up with the disquiet about immigration felt by many ordinary people. However, the debate is often confused and confusing. There is disagreement over whether it is actually possible to reduce net migration (the government's stated intention); the impact of immigration on the economy, employment and local communities; and, indeed, whom we are actually referring to when we talk about 'migrants'.

Similarly, the public debate about welfare, 'strivers' versus 'skivers' rhetoric and who is most deserving has intensified. Again, there is confusion about who is actually being referred to when we talk about 'people on benefits', with the picture painted in some sections of the media at odds with actual statistics on those who are in work and claiming benefits.

At the same time issues of national identity are being hotly debated and discussed. Do we identify as English, British and/ or European? Who do we belong to, and whom do we want to align with? With European elections and the Scottish referendum approaching this year, and a general election on the horizon next year, both the British union and our union with Europe are being re-examined and redefined, with anti-European sentiment in particular on the increase.

There is growing evidence that the tenor of the current national debates is having an impact on vulnerable groups and communities. The charity Childline has recently reported an alarming increase in racist bullying in schools⁶. Many of our local hosts are reporting an increase in hostile attitudes and behaviours towards vulnerable and marginalised groups. We know from past experience that divisive narratives, if left unchecked, can contribute to community tensions and reduce community resilience and social bonds, and it seems that some of this is being played out in local areas.

All this takes place against a backdrop of rising inequality across the UK, now ranked as one of the most unequal countries in the developed world⁷. The growing gap between London and the south-east and the rest of the country in terms of both economic prosperity and employment increases pressure on communities, particularly those which are most vulnerable and most marginalised.

3 <http://www.jrf.org.uk/media-centre/tough-attitudes-poverty>

4 <http://www.migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/reports/migration-news>

5 <http://tellmamauk.org/latest-figures-on-islamophobic-hate-crimes-from-the-met-police/>

6 http://www.nspcc.org.uk/news-and-views/media-centre/press-releases/2014/childline-report/bullying-self-harm-suicide-increases_wdn100346.html

7 <http://www.equalitytrust.org.uk/resources/multimedia/infographic-income-inequality-uk>

What kind of work is good relations work?

Much of the work of those involved in good relations is about developing local capacity for dealing with hot topics without resorting to threat, silencing or violence towards those who are most marginalised and have the least access to power and resources. Core to much good relations work in England is working with divisive narratives (for an explanation of ‘divisive narratives’ see the next section) which directly erode good community relations. It also includes working with narratives of powerlessness, distrust and despair that may be less directly corrosive but, if left unaddressed, can also lead to extremism and far right activity. This approach can involve opening up debates and dialogue within and between communities. Much good relations work is not just about working with the presenting issues; it is also about developing groups’ and communities’ voice and agency for change, thus addressing the underlying structural issues of poverty, power and prejudice that can fuel local divisive narratives.

Using examples gained from the local events, we found that the work that organisations do that they defined as ‘good relations work’ fell into six broad categories. There was agreement among many participants that a variety of different approaches were required, and that no one approach fitted all contexts. The categories were:

1. Work that strengthens the voice, agency and engagement of a marginalised or vulnerable group.

For example:

- Work with Somali Muslim women to help them develop English language skills so that they can confidently interact with education and health services
- Advocacy services for people who need support interacting with agencies
- Work with specific communities to strengthen their voice, and then to facilitate them communicating with others, e.g. supporting the Roma community in Newcastle to deliver information sessions about their culture in local schools, or working with young people so that they can deliver training events
- Supporting the integration of new arrivals or refugees into a neighbourhood through signposting them towards health, education, housing and other services
- Helping and befriending services, e.g. for homeless people in Newham
- Work with marginalised white communities

2. Work that seeks to build greater understanding of different identity and interest groups and develops skills for positive interaction.

For example:

- Work with communities or groups who are at risk of extremism, such as tackling extremism in colleges and universities, or tackling hate crime within neighbourhoods
- Work with young people who are caught up in territorial violence on local estates
- Work that takes the experience of one particular identity group and gives it a platform in order to create understanding in the wider community
- Tackling inaccurate perceptions held by one group about another which are increasing local tensions

3. Work that brings people together for a common purpose, or in a common place.

For example:

- Sport, art and media projects developing local people’s pride and sense of place
- Festivals such as Big Lunch events, street parties or street-play initiatives
- Work which aims to increase engagement in volunteering, activism, and civic life, such as community organising
- Reclaiming local land for a wild meadow project and community gardening projects

- Bringing community assets such as community buildings back into use for the benefit of all in the local neighbourhood
- Volunteering skills and time through organisations like Timebank, or sharing equipment, skills and under-used resources through organisations like Streetbank

These are activities, projects and events where the good relations element is more implicit. The assumption is that as a result of people sharing experiences, learning skills, or participating in a joint venture together, integration, trust and community spirit will be strengthened.

4. Work that directly tackles tensions between different groups and communities through mediation and dialogue.

For example:

- Supporting travellers and settled residents to exchange stories, share concerns, and develop communication links
- Work with victims and perpetrators within diaspora communities who have experienced violent conflict and war
- Strengthening relationships between young people and other residents on an estate
- Interfaith work encouraging familiarisation and dialogue
- Work in a primary school to improve relationships between parents of different faiths and ethnicities when tensions about cultural differences surfaced
- Work with former extremists and paramilitaries
- Strengthening relationships across geographical divides where there are underlying fractures in social relations

This approach is used where there are underlying or apparent tensions either between or within different groups, and as a way of challenging misperceptions and divisive narratives. It was also used to respond to national and international incidents that had the potential to raise tensions at a local level.

This work is seen as being the most risky and requiring the most specialist skills. It has been described by one experienced practitioner as ‘learning to sit in the fire’⁸. The assumption in much of this work is that community relationships become more resilient⁹ when groups are enabled to talk about difference and tensions directly but in a way that seeks to maintain and strengthen underlying relations.

5. Capacity building work.

For example:

- Support networks of organisations and people who are concerned about peace, good relations and community cohesion at a local and/ or regional level
- Organisations offering specific skills training in dialogue, conflict transformation and mediation
- Training young people in conflict resolution, peer leadership and mediation skills

6. Campaigning, political and rights-based work actively challenging media narratives and local and national policy.

Some local organisations see this as an essential part of their remit. At a national level, Citizens UK, Hope not Hate, Tell Mama UK and Runnymede Trust are examples of organisations directly engaged in campaigning and rights-based work that impacts on good relations.

⁸ p48 Broadwood & Sugden (2012) *We need to talk about...* <http://www.talkforachange.co.uk/wp-content/themes/haworth/publications/We%20Need%20To%20Talk%20About.pdf>

⁹ Much of the research on interpersonal resilience points to the ability to talk about the relationship itself as a key aspect of resilient relationships.

Challenges to good relations

Socio-economic factors, demographics, population churn and change, and local leadership can all pose specific challenges to local good relations. Although they were sometimes nuanced and weighted differently, the challenges people identified in very different local areas were similar.

Participants identified the following factors as posing challenges to local good relations:

Divisive narratives

‘Divisive narratives’¹⁰ is a term that originated in international peace-building contexts. It refers to a particular way of seeing or framing an issue. It may be partly based in fact, and will certainly have deep and strongly-held feelings associated with it. However, it will only be one side of a more complex and nuanced story. It is a way of seeing the world that includes some elements and leaves others out. Most importantly it creates a ‘them’ and an ‘us’.

Divisive narratives can be different in different local areas depending on socio-economic factors, demographics and other aspects of the local context. Since we began this project in early 2013, narratives of fairness and who is most deserving, of immigration and belonging, and of prejudice, have intensified.

People felt that this intensification had resulted in more overt displays of prejudice and more negative attitudes, in particular towards people on welfare and towards Muslims. People also noted a hardening in attitudes towards people who were claiming benefits because of disability.

At all of the local events people spoke about the portrayal of immigration in the media and the impact this is having on white British communities and some older migrant communities. Pervasive narratives about immigrants taking jobs and housing and putting pressure on local services felt all-consuming to many.

There were similar concerns about the way people on benefits are being portrayed in sections of the media and by politicians. Some people felt that the government was encouraging the scapegoating of certain groups, legitimising prejudice against them at a local level.

Changes to the benefits system and cuts to local services

Many organisations were dealing directly with people who were feeling the effects of the changes to the welfare and benefits system most acutely, both unemployed and working poor. Combined with cuts to local services, this can have the effect of removing two layers of support from those who are already vulnerable. It is important not to infer a causal relationship between poverty and a lack of cohesion: some areas of significant deprivation are also very cohesive. However, there was an anxiety, backed up by anecdotal evidence, that communities under pressure themselves were more likely to scapegoat others.

Existing segregation of communities

We note the recent JRF report¹¹ which reported that, overall, housing segregation is declining, and that there is more integration in local areas. However, ethnic segregation is still an issue in parts of the UK: recent research commissioned by the Challenge Network found that just one in 10 Britons have a best friend from a different ethnic background¹². Participants at events in areas where there is still a lot of segregation noted there were few public places available where cross-community interaction could take place, as people tended to stick to their own neighbourhoods, and children attended schools which were mostly mono-cultural. This lack of integration is perceived as problematic, as it means that different communities have little actual experience of each other, and myths about the ‘other’ can continue.

10. This term was first used in a UK context by Who Is Your Neighbour? in South Yorkshire, a community organisation using dialogue and conflict transformation approaches to tackle inaccurate perceptions held by one group about another and to strengthen understanding across divides.

11. http://www.ethnicity.ac.uk/census/885_CCSR_Neighbourhood_Bulletin_v7.pdf

12. <http://www.the-challenge.org/press/item/188-multicultural-britain-becoming-more-segregated---friendship-study>

Management of immigration

The actual management of migration was an issue for a few local areas and was seen as providing a different challenge to managing perceptions of immigration, which was common to all areas. Some reported that inward migration was not supported at a local level in terms of extra support for stretched services and work with settled communities to prepare them for new arrivals.

Other factors

People also discussed the hugely influential role of local community leaders and local media on good relations and reflected that strong community relations can be sometimes undermined very quickly by a single incident; there was particular reference to the murder of soldier Lee Rigby and the impact this had on anti-Muslim hate crime.

Positive stories

At the same time it is important to note that participants told many more inspiring and positive stories about local projects, activities and initiatives that provided opportunities for groups and communities to share in common endeavours and strengthen relationships across difference. They also provided examples of particular incidences where difficult community conversations had been facilitated with great success and benefit to local areas. We have included some particular examples of good relations work in this report.



Challenges to good relations work

The work of good relations is often under-the-radar, quiet work that relies on trust- and relationship-building over years, with its success measured by the absence of tensions and harmful community conflict. This can best be summarised as a sense that good relations work supports the maintenance of ‘social glue’, more likely to be noticed by its absence than its presence. Much of this work is close to the ground: small projects are run by volunteers or committed community members and, with some exceptions, there is very little networking or sharing of practice. Whilst it is an essential part of local community structures, this work is badly in need of a raise in profile, evaluation and impact assessment, so its value can be more widely acknowledged and understood.

Work on good relations is complex and requires time and resource

People talked about the complexity of good relations work: that it requires time and resource to tease out issues and to understand the complex dynamics underlying community tensions. Funding streams, when they are there, are often short term and on a project by project basis, which does not always allow for conversations and relationships to develop over time.

Cuts

At a time of deep cuts to local services, unsurprisingly, many of the organisations which are working directly with vulnerable groups and communities to strengthen good relations felt themselves to be under threat. In WNTTA we reported that over 70% of those we spoke to were experiencing cuts to funding. Many of the smaller community and voluntary sector organisations at events voiced concerns about funding. It was difficult to assess whether this was a generalised concern, or whether they had specific concerns relating to their own organisations. However, it is worth noting that since we began this project two of the local host organisations that we partnered with have closed because of lack of funding.

Measuring impact

Because much of this work is long term, rooted in communities, and under the radar it poses particular challenges with regard to impact measurement. There was wide variation in both organisational resources available to measure impact and understanding of how to measure it. Most people had a range of approaches to measuring the impact of their service for individual service users. However, measuring the impact of a service on local good relations is more problematic; it can be difficult to demonstrate the impact of a specific intervention in complex community situations. Many people said they would welcome guidance and would like easy-to-use accessible tools with clear indicators to help develop a greater understanding of the effects their work is having at a neighbourhood level.

Practitioner skills and confidence

A number of attendees talked about feeling unsure or uncertain about what to do when difficult or controversial issues arose in their work and their neighbourhoods. This can be when they are directly involved in conversations themselves, or seeing other professionals deal with situations with little understanding or skill. They felt they did not have the confidence, skill and information to tackle this. This can mean that they are less likely to engage with those with prejudiced or extremist views. Indeed, as reported in WNTTA, it takes time, patience and skill to tease out some of the nuances behind an instance of prejudice or hate speech and address the underlying concerns: it is easier to shut it down, or to avoid it altogether.

What kind of support is required?

Light-touch evaluations of events were carried out and feedback was overwhelmingly positive. The events themselves had provided people with food for thought, a place to reflect on their work, and new connections outside of their usual networks.

The following areas were identified as being helpful:

Opportunities to link with others locally

People were pleased at the range of organisations represented at events, and welcomed the chance to connect with others locally, both established colleagues and new contacts. They wanted more opportunities to link with others locally around the theme of good relations in order to: develop their skills and their understanding of local issues; connect with others around shared areas of concern; learn from others; and extend their local knowledge about other projects and services.

Skills development and learning from others

People particularly wanted to develop their skills in facilitation, dialogue and conflict resolution, to better enable them to hold productive community conversations and engage with particular groups and communities. They were interested in having a bank of good practice examples that they could access and use or adapt for their own situations. They were also interested in linking regionally and nationally, for example, through peer-to-peer support that helped to affirm, reassure and sometimes challenge practitioners about their practice, providing them with critical friends and sounding boards when they were facing challenges, including working with local media.

Help telling other stories

Participants were interested in strengthening the voices of the grassroots organisations and the communities and groups they represented, whom they felt were often not well-represented in national and local media. Some also wanted help to work with the media in developing more nuanced stories both locally and nationally. Many were concerned to address divisive narratives that happened online but that had a particular impact on a local area or issue. They wanted practice and on-the-ground experience to more directly influence policy at a local and national level.

Academic and research perspectives

In a couple of places practitioners were well-networked with academic and research perspectives on good relations and related areas of study that informed and influenced their practice. We think that academic research in fields such as social psychology, international conflict studies, and youth and criminal justice, for example, might be helpful in both influencing practice on the ground, and providing a theoretical underpinning for the work.

National network and alliance focused on good relations

In most areas people were broadly supportive of the idea of a national network and alliance focused around good relations, but with some important caveats. Many people felt that local networks were the priority for them. Although people could see the value of face-to-face meetings they were aware of the time and resources that might take up, but at the same time they were concerned that an online network might not meet their needs in the same way.

Conclusions

We were initially unsure about the term ‘good relations’ and whether it accurately described the range of work that contributes towards cohesive, resilient and peaceful communities, i.e. communities where there is bridging and linking social capital as well as bonding social capital. However, we have become more convinced that this term is one that many people can relate to, and which others see as including factors such as geography, age, class and gender as well ethnicity and faith. Indeed it is often at the intersection of a range of different factors that difficult debates occur, evidenced by the variety and complexity of work that people attending events were engaged in.

Furthermore we think that it is the variety of approaches itself that contributes to strengthening good relations. From work that supports the integration of new, vulnerable and marginalised groups to that which brings diverse groups together to celebrate and strengthen common bonds and trust, to that which calms community tensions and fosters intergroup contact and dialogue, to that which directly addresses extremism and radicalisation within specific groups. All of these form part of a spectrum of interventions from preventative work to direct intervention work that together support cohesive, resilient and peaceful communities.

We are aware that there are areas of England that we did not reach, and that there are organisations and practitioners strengthening community relations and resilience who would not initially characterise their work as contributing to good relations. We hope to reach out to these local areas and organisations in the future in order to build a broad-based and inclusive alliance.

Despite the intentions of the Big Society and Localism agendas, there has been a falling away of local and regional infrastructure resulting in fewer opportunities to learn from and about other initiatives and approaches. However, a few areas still had good local and sub-regional networks in place. For example, Thinkspace, run by Programme for a Peaceful City at the University of Bradford, provides for practitioners, community activists and academics to meet regularly, sharing and strengthening approaches together. The local event held in Leeds involved four organisations from across the region collaborating to draw together a diverse range of organisations and individuals. We think this model of local and sub-regional networks is a strong one, and could offer considerable benefit to local areas.

We are aware of other national organisations whose work includes issues of good relations, and which are working to develop engaged, resilient and cohesive communities. Organisations such as British Future and Runnymede Trust are doing important work in providing more nuanced stories about identity, race and immigration. Organisations such as Locality and the Challenge Network are mobilising communities and young people in new social action initiatives.

However, we think there is a place for an alliance specifically focused on good relations which amplifies the voices of the many organisations and practitioners in local areas who are working alongside groups and communities to support them in telling other stories. These are the stories of positive good relations happening at a local level, initiated and facilitated by local organisations, agencies and committed volunteers. They are stories that reflect more complex, nuanced narratives about hot topics such as welfare, immigration and integration. They are stories about people coming together out of curiosity, interest, need and shared concerns to forge common bonds, local alliances and even friendships; of diverse groups being encouraged to deal with their differences and talk about the things that matter to them, in a way that allows for disagreement without harming underlying social bonds.

People brought many of these stories to the local events, but they rarely come to public attention. This is partly to do with the nature of journalism and media itself, which thrives on conflict and is not that interested in ‘good news’. A national alliance for good relations could build a portfolio of such stories, offering skills development, peer support, good practice examples and, just as importantly, a message of encouragement and hope.

Next steps

We are continuing conversations with other organisations and partners and are developing a proposal for a light-touch national alliance with the following aims:

- To strengthen the voice of local good relations work nationally in order to provide good practice examples, tell other stories, and raise the profile of the work
- To strengthen the capacity, skills and knowledge of all those engaged in good relations work on the ground, through fostering connections locally, regionally and nationally
- To develop easy-to-use, accessible impact measurement tools

The evidence we have gathered from local areas indicates that it needs to be:

- **Locally driven:** the alliance should be owned and controlled by sub-regional collectives of practitioners
- **Locally and sub-regionally hosted but with national coordination:** the voice, agency and direction for the alliance should come from local and sub-regional hosts, supported by some national coordination
- **Light-touch:** the alliance should not be something which is resource intensive
- **Making use of technology:** a digital platform for sharing information and resources

During the setting-up period, the alliance would be incubated within an appropriate organisation and we are actively seeking a national partner to act in this capacity. If you are interested in getting involved please do get in touch.



Good practice case studies

WORK THAT STRENGTHENS VOICE, ENGAGEMENT AND AGENCY

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WORK THAT SEEKS TO BUILD UNDERSTANDING OF DIFFERENT IDENTITIES AND INTERESTS

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WORK THAT DIRECTLY TACKLES TENSIONS BETWEEN GROUPS AND COMMUNITIES

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WORK THAT BRINGS PEOPLE TOGETHER FOR COMMON PURPOSES

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WORK THAT BUILDS CAPACITY IN COMMUNITIES AND GOOD RELATIONS ORGANISATIONS

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CASE STUDY ONE: Talk for a Change assists community groups to find a shared voice

Talk for a Change worked in a collaborative partnership with the London Borough of Tower Hamlets and nine local organisations between March 2012 and February 2013. The aim was to support nine locally-rooted community organisations to develop their activities in line with current community cohesion best practice and guidance, whilst also addressing the potential for co-production of services in their neighbourhoods.

For example, Shadwell People's Forum brought elders from St Paul's Church, Darul Ummah Mosque and the Rooted Forum together with local residents to address a long-standing issue that occurs every Ramadan. Surrounding the Darul Ummah Mosque are a number of housing blocks, many of which house elderly white, predominantly female residents. During Ramadan there are many complaints from residents about youths roaming around the estate at night. The partners worked together to address this issue:

'Before Ramadan we had one relationship-building meeting with residents – consisting of older white w/c residents and younger m/c resident groups, and then another where we worked out what we can do to avoid the anti-social behaviour. Prayers often finish around 12.30/midnight. Some young people say they are going to the mosque but instead they link up with their friends, or they leave prayers early and link up with their friends. St Paul's Church and Darul Ummah mosque organised a rota where they had volunteers with high viz jackets on all around the estate to approach young people to ensure that anti-social behaviour was avoided. Perhaps the first time ever in the history of Tower Hamlets that a Christian church and a mosque have worked together on this sort of initiative. So a two-fold approach – volunteers who did the estate outreach work, and then the Rooted Forum provided alternative activities so that young people didn't need to hang out outside. Interesting to see white English people looking like they are part of the mosque particularly throughout Ramadan. We are the second largest mosque in Tower Hamlets so it sets a really good example for the rest of the borough.'

www.talkforachange.co.uk

CASE STUDY TWO: Avon and Somerset Police help people to speak up about hate crime

Avon and Somerset Police have officers engaged in community relations work, building trust between the police and the community, and training up and encouraging young people to take appropriate action against hate crime and other community tensions.

Officers deliver Play Your Part, a series of workshops for Year 8s, in secondary schools in Bristol. The workshops promote good citizenship and encourage young people to respect others, understand the law, and have the courage to stand up for what is right. Topics include knife crime, hate crime, prison and fire service, drugs and alcohol, First Aid.

In addition to generic sessions, one officer provides training and support to students who are vulnerable and/ or have varying degrees of disabilities. Some of these students were being intimidated on the bus. As they were unsure how to share their concerns they chose to walk home late at night, leaving them at possibly greater risk. Many of the students had never had contact with the police before. With the support of carers, the officer was able to offer advice about how to deal with the intimidatory behaviour. She also arranged for the local PCSO to board the bus at relevant times and briefed the bus company. The impact was positive and the students were able to continue using the bus without further incidents.

A few weeks later a student from the same group disclosed that a male had befriended him and was now giving him money. The officer was able to intervene and stop this potentially exploitative association. Being able to share incidents such as this has encouraged students to report hate crime more regularly to the police.

www.avonandsomerset.police.uk

CASE STUDY ONE: Schools Linking Network: Routes to Peace Event

In June 2013 a Routes to Peace event was held in Bradford to celebrate the city's long-standing peace heritage. It provided an opportunity for hundreds of children and adults to learn more about peace and our individual and collective roles in peace-making within civil society. Over 300 children participated in school linking programmes helping them understand different faiths and cultures. They took part in a 'Big Sing for Peace' and dance, story-telling, and sculpture workshops that explored peace-making themes.

The Chief Executive of Bradford Council and the Lord Mayor were among those attending the finale event. The Lord Mayor commented:

'The Routes to Peace initiative engages so many different communities. Bradford is a leader in peace heritage. There are 130 nationalities in the city – and today has been an opportunity to celebrate and engage different cultures. If we want to make more peace in the world we need to nurture our future generations.'

The event was organised by members of the Stronger Communities Partnership with support from Bradford Council, Joseph Rowntree Foundation, and Raise the Roof, among others.

www.schoolslinkingnetwork.org.uk

CASE STUDY TWO: Aik Saath working in schools on understanding difference

The words 'Aik Saath' mean 'Together As One' in Hindi, Punjabi and Urdu and embody the ethos of our Queen's Award-winning charity.

Aik Saath was established in response to gang violence between young people from Asian backgrounds in Slough in the late 1990s. Over 15 years later, young people are still leading our efforts to resolve conflict. Our projects are led by a group of over fifty volunteer peer trainers aged between 11 and 21. They train other young people in conflict resolution skills and the knowledge to strengthen community cohesion. Our volunteers also host a weekly youth café and organise educational events to tackle issues such as knife crime and territorial conflicts. In times when the cohesion of our town might be compromised, such as the riots of 2011, the death of Lee Rigby and a recent march in our town by the English Defence League, we proactively organise events and initiatives to safeguard good relations between people.

We know we have made a difference when the friends, relatives, teachers and youth workers of young people we work with and the young people themselves attest to a difference in their attitudes. For example, we were invited to work with some students that were racially abusing passers-by during their lunch break. Over a period of time we worked with the students to help them understand the human impact of what they were doing. We took them to meet people from other backgrounds, including to the local Gurdwara. The students designed posters explaining the meaning of hate crime which are now displayed at local temples to raise awareness and to encourage reporting. The students' teacher has informed us that racial abuse no longer takes place at the school.

www.aiksaath.com

CASE STUDY THREE: Boston College CabCam

Boston in Lincolnshire has faced many challenges to good relations, giving the town unwanted national and international media attention. Immigration of economic migrants to the area has been a main focus of these tensions.

Students at Boston FE College come from all communities. Students were invited to share their views on community cohesion; their stories were made into a short film produced in an ex-London Taxi now turned mobile recording studio.

60 students were asked a variety of questions on life in their town and how they get on with people of different backgrounds, capturing students' understanding of cohesion in a creative and non-threatening manner, allowing them to express their fears and feelings, thoughts and aspirations. The results were extremely positive, with students reporting that they had made many friends, gained confidence and got to know more about the diversity of Boston and its people. The project has helped challenge the often negative view that prevails in Boston on the subject of immigration. The film now features as part of the College's induction to reassure learners that the College is a safe and welcoming place to study for people of all backgrounds. Watch the film on the College's YouTube website:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_DLqmBhrakE

CASE STUDY ONE: 'Who Is Your Neighbour?' South Yorkshire conversations

'Who Is Your Neighbour?' began in January 2010 and works in the four local authority areas of South Yorkshire. WIYN initiates and holds Safe Space Conversations where people can be honest, raise questions and fears, say things that 'you're not allowed to say' and in which there is space for reflection, questioning and challenge. A particular feature of our work is *intra-community* dialogue – dialogue within a community, where the 'other' may be experienced as a disturbance in some way but is not present in the dialogue.

Following a racist incident outside a drop-in facility we were asked by City of Sanctuary Sheffield to work with a network of groups supporting refugees and asylum seekers. We have held monthly dialogue sessions since last summer with six to 12 participants, a mixture of asylum seekers, refugees, and members of the host community. We explored people's experiences of racism and how they dealt with it – learning from each other what helps and what doesn't. The role of the bystander was identified as important – finding a way of intervening without escalating.

This work has been new for us in that it combines elements of both '*intra*' and '*inter*' community dialogue. We have explored differences and misunderstandings that arise *within* this community and *between* this community and other communities. Misunderstandings often arise due to lack of awareness of or insensitivity to cultural differences; in the safety of the group we have also been able to explore painful experiences. Participants find it a helpful space to talk about things that have been puzzling or troubling which they have not been able to talk about together.

CASE STUDY TWO: Kumon Y'all address community tensions

Kumon y'all is a local community organisation that brings together people of different backgrounds to increase understanding and positive interaction across cultural and religious differences. Our mission is that *'we refuse to be part of the problem, to be victims, to bury our heads in the sand, turn the other cheek or walk away. Above all we refuse to say there is nothing we can do to change things or bleat what can we few do.'*

Young Muslim men attending project sessions highlighted poor community relations and a lack of interaction between Muslims and Non-Muslims in the local area. Support workers expressed the fear that the 'bother' between communities could escalate to physical conflict and serious harm. The young men decided they wanted to organise a football tournament as a way of tackling the issues. Despite initial reservations from their support worker, the boys remained adamant and passionate about their idea. They committed to putting in the work required and began their planning. The support worker sought guidance from the Football Association and Sporting Equals.

Madrassahs, Churches, Schools and community sports organisations were contacted to engage diverse communities in the tournament. A team of Imams and Church leaders from different branches of Islam and Christianity were invited to form and play a charity game against each other. The local MP and a senior police officer accepted the invitation to referee this match. Around 200 players, in 23 teams from schools, madrassahs, mosques and churches in Dewsbury took part in the tournament. Over 400 young and old, male and female spectators from different communities enjoyed the matches and took part in other activities at the event, and it raised over £5000 for the young people's chosen charity, Dewsbury Hospital.

Kumon Y'all founder Farooq Yunus said:

'Normally with football there are arguments, but we had none. It was really good fun and our aim of making friends and having a good time was achieved. We weren't even off the field and people were asking when the next event would be!'

www.kumonyall.co.uk

CASE STUDY ONE: People United – We All Do Good Things

People United is a creative arts laboratory exploring the potential of the arts to inspire kindness, and from that a sense of community and social change. Their approach is motivated by a belief in the power of the arts and is rooted in a strong theoretical framework and academic research. In 2009 People United undertook a project in Herne Bay, which has areas of significant deprivation, and lower levels of volunteering and participation in the arts than elsewhere. The aim was to bring the town together by sharing and celebrating local good news stories through the arts.

Called We All Do Good Things, the project took place in bingo halls, beach huts, shop fronts, sports clubs, schools and residential homes. 14 professional artists and arts organisations worked with different groups to uncover and celebrate positive stories. In total 5,702 people participated in 92 free public workshops and events. They came from all parts of the population; members of Age Concern wrote books on friendship, adults with mental health issues made a film on kindness, schoolchildren brought their own stories to life through craft and design. A hairdressing salon hosted a play based on life-affirming tales heard from customers. The Sea Cadets delivered messages of goodwill in a giant green bottle, and photos of unsung community heroes were displayed across the town. Over 1000 people came together for a Giant Picnic where there was dancing, live music, and family activities.

The project has had an enduring legacy. It inspired the Herne Bay community to set up a number of initiatives to increase arts participation, trust, neighbourliness and volunteering, and the Giant Picnic has become an annual summer event run by Herne Bay in Bloom and local partners.

www.peopleunited.org.uk

CASE STUDY TWO: Interactive – Leeds Intercultural Partnership

Now in its third year, Inter-Active is built upon the successes of the Leeds Interfaith Cricket project founded in Feb 2008 as a unique intercultural partnership between the Jewish and Muslim communities of Leeds (since expanded to include other faiths – specifically Christian, Hindu and Sikh). Inter-Active uses sport as a means of achieving sustainable cross-community dialogue and reconciliation. The sport brings young people of disparate ethnic, social and religious backgrounds together, a platform from which conversation can follow.

Some of these young people choose to explore differences and bridge social/cultural divides through facilitated dialogue, which engenders a greater sense of mutual trust and solidarity between diverse communities. Some of the most meaningful conversations that we have had have been those which have been facilitated. On some occasions the facilitators organised activities around which the talking could happen. In one mapping exercise the young people drew a map of Leeds showing each other which areas they knew and felt safe in, which they felt unsafe in and why. Exercises such as these ‘developed bridging capital and fostered understanding across the two groups’ wrote Dr Lucy Mayblin of the University of Sheffield.

A further key element of our project is the creation of a young people’s Leadership Group. This group undertakes a leadership course which helps them to reflect on identity and interfaith working and includes a residential in the Yorkshire Dales. During the residential the young people cooked and ate together, went caving and planted trees helping to restore the Dales’ environment. This group then became potential ambassadors in their communities, acting as what John-Paul Lederach describes as the ‘critical yeast’ that change in communities comes from... people who’ve been enabled to imagine a different future.

www.inter-active.org.uk

CASE STUDY ONE: Programme for a Peaceful City – Thinkspace

PPC (Programme for a Peaceful City) is a hub of peace thinking and practice. We share ideas to make our knowledge work for Bradford and beyond. We believe that peace scholars and academics working on social and international issues, can contribute thinking and ideas towards the complexities of conflict and peacebuilding here in Bradford and the UK. Our work includes collaborations and knowledge exchange between academics, practitioners and activists. This includes skill development and applying our understanding, knowledge, ideas and reflective practice to current conflicts and tricky issues.

The PPC Thinkspace was established in 2007 to create space for knowledge exchange. It is a gathering of academics, practitioners and activists interested in sharing reflections about dialogue, peacebuilding, participation and good relations. It is also a space to try out and experience different processes. Discussions have included: tensions and issues raised by Lee Rigby's murder, how Citizens Juries can explore conflicting issues, how cities can build resilience to respond to potential violence, and how to disagree better.

In April 2013 peace practitioners and community activists from the Netherlands and Germany decided to hold their Grundtvig-funded gathering in Bradford. Working in partnership with the UK Partners ICA UK¹³, the PPC Thinkspace hosted an event bringing together guests from the Netherlands and Germany with Thinkspace participants to explore the question 'Responding to Challenges in the 21st century: Resilience, Resistance or Both?'. The process was a taster of the Kumi¹⁴ peacebuilding framework, developed in Palestine and Israel, explained and facilitated by Jonathan Dudding and Ann Lukens.

CASE STUDY TWO: Newcastle Conflict Resolution Network

Newcastle Conflict Resolution Network is a group of people, volunteers and interested professionals, coming together to prevent, reduce and resolve destructive conflict and support those doing so in Newcastle upon Tyne. The network is supported by a management group and grant aid. It provides educational workshops and support for members, enabling them to work on community conflict with enthusiasm and hope.

In addition to the network itself, NCRN provides capacity building activities in communities. For example, NCRN has worked in Walker, Newcastle, for more than six years, to build the capacity of residents to deal with conflict in their lives. Nearly a hundred people have now completed the first stage of training in conflict resolution developed by independent charity Alternatives to Violence. The course generated very positive feedback:

'The course was excellent, it was delivered very professionally. The content was very interesting and relevant with lots of shared learning.' 'The other participants were fantastic too and we have agreed to keep in touch and continue our friendship, I can honestly say I haven't laughed so much for a very long time and that was a tonic in itself.' 'I will use the techniques that I have learned to resolve conflict without aggression and violence.'

NCRN has also been running a *Partnership Programme* over the last two years to promote children's emotional wellbeing and skills. Our partnership has been with the charity Partnership for Children who have developed a worldwide teaching programme for young children, with teachers of three Primary schools in Walker, with the children in their Years 1 and 2 and with parents of the children, who have also been learning about the programme so that they can make use of it at home.

The Parent programme is a NCRN innovation. Parents have told us how much they have enjoyed the activities and 'hearing stories from other parents' and have commented that their children 'open up more and engage more freely', 'are more communicative and aware of feelings and how to express them' and 'think more of others'.

13. <http://www.ica-uk.org.uk/>

14. http://www.ica-uk.org.uk/images/stories/Kumi_History_and_Description.pdf