

11. International Web-Audit of Grass-roots & Local Government Initiatives

This chapter is based on a web-audit of grass-roots initiatives in the UK, New Zealand, Canada and the US which aim to foster better relations between Muslims and Non-Muslims

Initiative Title: Te Korowai Whakapono: New Zealand Inter- Faith Network

Organised by: Human Rights Commission (NZ)

Contact Details: Rohan Jaduram, PO Box 5428, Wellington NZ, Ph: 09 3758640, Email: rohanj@hrc.co.nz

Funded by: Government and private funding

Time Period of Initiative: Established in 2005, organises annual religious diversity forum

Number of participants involved: 100+ participants in annual forum

Target Group: Groups that undertake interfaith activities

Project Description: NZ Inter-Faith Network is an interfaith network update which aims to support and publicise groups that undertake interfaith activities, projects and programmes that contribute to religious tolerance, public understanding of religions, and interfaith cooperation for peace, security and harmonious relations. The network operates on the principles of inclusivity, mutual respect, acceptance of difference and the autonomy of participants.

The network is facilitated by the Human Rights Commission as part of the [New Zealand Diversity Action Programme](#). The Diversity Action Programme, a ten point plan to strengthen cultural diversity, was adopted by a community forum at Parliament in August 2004 following the desecration of two Jewish cemeteries in Wellington. Organisations are encouraged to register annual projects with the Diversity Action Programme that further the goals of the network

A religious diversity forum for the network is held as part of the New Zealand Diversity Forum in August each year. This year's forum was held on 27 August in Auckland. A national interfaith forum is also organised by regional interfaith councils in February each year. Some of the projects for 2007 included World Week of Prayer for Peace, faith community and interfaith group participation in Race Relations Day 2007, a series of

seminars on Life Cycles as celebrated by different religious communities, and a Building Bridges Programme, among others.

Successes and Challenges: NZ Inter-Faith Network has played a significant role in supporting the formation and strengthening of interfaith networks and councils around the country, and in liaising with government on interfaith and ethnic community issues. The main challenge is to overcome the few cases of religious and ethnic intolerance in New Zealand that have focused attention on faith groups and relationships with wider society.

What evaluation (if any) was conducted: N.A.

Initiative Title: The Distance We Have Travelled: The real experience of Refugees and Asylum Seekers

Organised by: Ahmed Iqbal Ullah Education Trust

Full Contact Details: Emma Britain, Devonshire House, University Precinct Centre, Oxford Rd, Manchester, M13 9PL, Ph: 0161 275 2920, Email: rrarchive@manchester.ac.uk

Funded by: Self-funded.

Time Period of Initiative: Established in 2005.

Number of participants involved: N.A.

Target Group: Somali, Kurdish and Afghani communities in Greater Manchester.

Project Description: The Distance We Have Travelled was created by the Ahmed Iqbal Ullah Education Trust and began in April 2005. It is a project aimed at recording life-stories of three refugee communities in the Greater Manchester area. Members of the Somali, Kurdish and Afghani communities have been interviewed about their experiences of having to flee their own troubled countries and making a new life here in Britain.

The project has been led by Trust Education Outreach Coordinator, Jackie Ould. Local artist Kevin Dalton-Johnson has worked developing the exhibition and its supporting ceramics and art with refugee students in Whalley Range High School for girls and City College, Manchester. The interviews have been collected by outreach workers and sessional workers from the respective refugee communities. These life stories have been incorporated in an exhibition that helps to explain the realities of the refugee experience, and challenge the hostile images frequently found in the media. Video artist Humberto Velez has worked with both Kevin Dalton-Johnson and Anisa Dani to document the experience of those involved in the project.

The exhibition consists of 4 wings, mounted on a lino floor. The floor is a map of the world with footprint trails of the journeys some of the refugees interviewed have made from their home countries to Britain. One wing focuses on the wider Refugee experience in Britain. The other three wings focus on Somalia, Kurdistan, and Afghanistan. They include

positive images of these places and maps, with short text explaining the reasons for refugee movement; positive images of these communities in Manchester, overlaid with excerpts from their life story interviews. The exhibition boards also include shelves that hold ceramic artwork produced by refugees in a series of workshops that have been led by Kevin.

Successes and Challenges: Exhibition has been well-received by more than 6,000 people across 11 locations.

What evaluation (if any) was conducted: N.A.

Initiative Title: The Peace Alliance

Organised by: The Peace Alliance

Full Contact Details: 117 Bruce Grove, Tottenham, London N17 6UR, Ph: 020 8808 9439, Email: info@peacealliance.org.uk

Funded by: Local government councils, business groups

Time Period of Initiative: Established in 2001, annual Week of Peace celebration

Number of participants involved: Various numbers at different activities organised by the alliance. Over 5,000 participants engage in Week of Peace activities.

Target Group: Local residents and community organisations within the extensive locations covered by the Alliance.

Project Description: The Peace Alliance is an independent voluntary organisation working to reduce the fear of crime, and to promote peace in the community. The Peace Alliance was formed as a result of community reactions against local criminality. Initially the peace alliance sought to establish links within local faith, voluntary and community organisations as a means to arrange a themed 'Week of Peace', which aimed to annually celebrate the diversity of cultures and to confront any impediments to this celebration. The Peace Alliance key objective is to reduce the fear of crime within local communities by:

- Promoting peace and good citizenship
- Restoring a sense community and involving all communities in a concerted effort towards community safety
- Engaging and working with young people

The Peace Alliances develops versatile projects and events to promote peace and address community safety issues. These include the annual Week of Peace celebrations, borough based breakfast meetings, local projects in partnership with community groups, youth events, specialist support to families of fatal victims of crime, developing community leadership and supporting community crime reduction initiatives. The Peace Alliance is committed to linking and working with other community organisations to promote a

community safety message; discussing the issues and likely solutions to issues of crime; assisting in the development of positive change. Examples of projects developed by The Peace Alliance:

Peace Walk: The Peace Walk began with a multi-faith service held outside the Town Hall. The aim of the peace walk was to establish an event within the midst of problematic communities to represent cultural diversity and community cohesion through displays of peace assemblies, sports events, as well as faith and community based action.

Police Open Days: In reaction to numerous allegations of pupils carrying knives, and fights having occurred from between various schools, a day of liaison between police and senior pupils was conducted to promote understanding throughout the schooling community.

Successes and Challenges: The Week of Peace organised by the Peace Alliance has been very successful with over 5,000 local residents taking part; statistics gathered illustrated a significant reduction in crime during the Week of Peace.

What evaluation (if any) was conducted: N.A.

Initiative Title: Camden Hip Hop Café

Organised by: Kentish Town Community Organisation

Full Contact Details: Masood Lone, Camden Town Hall, Judd Street, London WC1H 9JE
Ph: 020-7278 4444 Email: Masood.Lone@camden.gov.uk

Funded by: Kentish Town Community Organisation and London Borough of Camden's Equalities and Social Inclusion Team.

Time Period of Initiative: Established in March 2006; monthly events.

Number of participants involved: 70-100 participants

Target Group: Youths from various ethnic and religious backgrounds

Project Description: Launched in March 2006, the aim of the Café Hip Hop project is to encourage young people to tackle topical issues such as social cohesion, violence and youth crime through fun, attractive and positive activities. The project was developed in order to tackle issues relating to barriers to education and employment, social exclusion, and to help reduce youth crime in Camden. The Café Hip Hop has been developed by the Kentish Town Community Organisation [KTCO] with the support of the London Borough of Camden's Equalities and Social Inclusion Team.

In July 2005 the borough found itself at the centre of the terrorist attacks on London, with two of the bomb attacks taking place in the borough. As one of the most ethnically diverse parts of the capital, with a large Muslim population, Camden Council was acutely aware of

the risks to social cohesion as people came to terms with what had happened. The Social Inclusion Team revisited its strategy, looking at ways to strengthen the strong sense of community, trust and understanding between all of the people who live and work in Camden. A large number of young people are often found on the streets around Kentish Town and Camden Town where there is also an endemic drugs culture.

The aim was consistent with those pursued by KTCO Directors for many years, namely to tackle head on drugs, gang violence and the need for excellence in education concentrating on academic pursuit. Many of the current youth leaders used to belong to gangs themselves and have lived in the area for many years. They were familiar with the needs of the youth and polled opinion amongst youths on the street whether they would be interested in the Café Hip Hop format. At one event, a former gang member from Harlesden had a discussion forum on his background of gang warfare, drugs and gun violence, giving his experiences of how he has rehabilitated himself. Inspector John Daly from Camden Police then led a debate about Anti-Social Behaviour Orders (ASBO) issued by the police and whether they were having a positive or negative effect on youth freedoms.

Successes and Challenges: Key young members (aged under 16) of a Somali gang in Camden have left and are in the process of rehabilitating themselves through guidance from KTCO youth leaders. One member of the largest Somali gang in Camden (Over 18) has left the gang and has been sponsored by KTCO for full-time higher education. Counselling from some of the Café Hip Hop speakers has helped dim the gloss and excitement that draws many young people to gang life and crime. This has been the first real interaction between white and BME youth. Parents from all backgrounds (White/BME) have come in with their children to ensure their children attend and listen to the speakers and debates.

What evaluation (if any) was conducted: KTCO directors and youth workers review each event in terms of activities conducted as well as participant turnout and satisfaction. The project has received a very positive response from the young people who attended. There has been a high level of take up, with between 70 and 100 young people attending the sessions held since the launch of the project.

Initiative Title: Southampton Women's Network

Organised by: Southampton City Council

Full Contact Details: Lepsa Stojkovic, Southampton City Council, Civic Centre, Southampton SO147LY, Ph: 023 80223855, Email: lepsa.stojkovic@southampton.gov.uk

Funded by: Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG) grant through the Government Office South East.

Time Period of Initiative: Established in December 2006; nine different events with a range of different activities took place between December 2006 and the end of March 2007.

Number of participants involved: In total, more than 900 women

Target Group: Women from various communities within the Council region.

Project Description: The Southampton Women's Network project brings together women's groups from different backgrounds to increase understanding between communities, increase capacity, and address shared concerns. The group first met in December 2006 to deliver a series of activities leading up to celebrating International Women's Day in March 2007. Over 900 women took part in these activities and more events are planned for 2007/8.

Following two consultation exercises with women from new and established Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) communities, Southampton City Council found that women in the inner city wanted to promote dialogue between different communities; develop projects to promote education, health, and safety awareness; and gain resources to develop their own projects; and gain a greater understanding of services available.

Some of the activities organised included:

- Two Safety Awareness sessions were held with seventy women attending (50% from a BME background).
- A Cookery Exchange Programme brought participants together to teach one another how to cook their own national or family dish. Six sessions were held and participants came from English, Persian, Somali, Afghani, German, Spanish, Polish, Hindu, Sikh, Muslim and African-Caribbean backgrounds.
- An Inspirational Women / Diversity social event was held where women from different communities said which women influenced their lives the most.
- A Women's Health and Well-Being Day was held at a local sports centre where over ninety women attended. Agency stalls providing information on health awareness, breastfeeding, CV writing, and setting up your own business. There were also free taster sessions in wall climbing, yoga, aerobics, and hip-hop lessons. The most popular stand offered full body health checks.
- A Women's Rights and Issues Day was attended by forty women. Stallholders offered information on employment, support to victims of sexual crimes, domestic violence, children's rights, counselling and therapy, housing issues, and sports development.
- International Women's Day celebrations were launched at the Civic Centre with a series of activities including poetry reading, Chinese and Afghani dancing, drumming, gallery tours and Persian Calligraphy workshops.

Successes and Challenges: Wide range of activities attracted tremendous response from women from diverse backgrounds. The contact and rapport developing between women from white, established BME, and new communities is the most valuable result from the celebrations and forum meetings, and will underlie future work.

What evaluation (if any) was conducted: Primarily via attendance sheets and feedback forms. Also via anecdotal evidence from participants' comments.

Initiative Title: The Islam Project

Organised by: Active Voice

Full Contact Details: 2601, Mariposa Street, San Francisco, CA 94110, Ph: (415) 553-2841, Email: info@activevoice.net

Funded by: Carnegie Corporation of New York, The James Irvine Foundation, The Nathan Cummings Foundation, Surdna Foundation, and the Hasan Family Foundation.

Time Period of Initiative: Ongoing campaign since 2002.

Number of participants involved: Hundreds of participants across ten cities in the US.

Target Group: Non-Muslim teenagers and adults in educational and corporate and organisations.

Project Description: The Islam Project is a multimedia effort aimed at schools, communities, and individuals who want a clearer understanding of this institution: complex, diverse, historically and spiritually rich, and—to many—mysterious and even forbidding. The project comprises two PBS documentaries, a vibrant community engagement campaign, and an ambitious educational effort.

The project involves a national community engagement campaign to raise public awareness, build community bridges, support dialogue, offer educational resources, and explore workplace issues as they relate to Muslims. The Islam Project is partnering with interfaith and other community-based organisations to focus attention on issues facing Muslims in America and throughout the world. The campaign includes a range of tools—both video and print—for use by community organisations, educators, civil rights leaders, policymakers, journalists, employers, and those in the general public who want to learn more about Muslims and Islam.

Communities in ten cities—Atlanta, Boston, Chicago, Cleveland, Dallas, Detroit, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Washington, D.C., and Wichita, Kansas—have launched campaigns based on the tools of the Islam Project. These campaigns are flexible, educational, and strategic; designed to allow communities to tailor their efforts to their particular concerns.

Successes and Challenges: The project has helped raise public awareness in promoting understanding and knowledge of Islam, helping decrease prejudice and discrimination; built bridges in creating new alliances between Muslim and non-Muslim groups, as well as supported dialogue and offered new educational resources about Islam.

What evaluation (if any) was conducted: Feedback from participant surveys indicated substantial support for the project.

Initiative Title: Habitat for Humanity Interfaith Projects

Organised by: Habitat for Humanity International

Full Contact Details: 121 Habitat Street, Americus, GA 31709-3498, USA, Ph: 1-800-422-4828, Email: publicinfo@habitat.org

Funded by: New homeowners' house payments, donations and no-interest loans provided by supporters and money earned by fund-raising activities.

Time Period of Initiative: Established in 1976, ongoing project

Number of participants involved: Thousands involved in projects worldwide

Target Group: Volunteers and new homeowners from various religious backgrounds

Project Description: In many communities, when people of different faiths come together to build a Habitat for Humanity house, tension gives way to laughter and individuals find new respect for one another. Coming together for the common goal of building a house with a neighbour in need has proven to be a successful way for bringing healing to divided communities and creating sense of unity. 'The Holy Toledo Build' in Ohio brought together Christians, Jews and Muslims to build a home, but the result was a symbolic gesture that broke down many barriers and led to the creation of new and powerful friendships. During a similar project in Winston-Salem, N.C., organisers said their build allowed participants an opportunity for honest dialogue and newfound respect for one another.

As with any partnership, the key to developing interfaith projects is building relationships. Approaching new partners from a spirit of humility and cooperation sets the stage for success. Inherent to many people of faith is the call to serve the poor, to make the world a better place and to be in service to others. Understanding that building a Habitat home is a clear expression of faith for people of many beliefs is a wonderful way to include diverse faith partners in a building project.

Interfaith builds also bring with them questions and challenges. For example, the food coordinator of a project in Redmond, Wash noted that cooking for 1,200 Muslims, Jews and Catholics takes not only careful planning but an appreciation for religious customs. Kitchen volunteers took care to avoid using chicken stock and to separate the food on the serving table. The food was kosher and halal—cooked in accordance with Jewish and Muslim traditions. Workers also took breaks during the project while Muslims observed prayer times.

Successes and Challenges: Through the work of Habitat, thousands of low-income families have found new hope in the form of affordable housing. Churches, other religious groups, and local communities have joined together to successfully tackle a significant social problem—decent housing for all. Today, Habitat for Humanity has built more than 200,000 houses, sheltering more than 1,000,000 people in more than 3,000 communities worldwide.

What evaluation (if any) was conducted: N.A.

Initiative Title: Interfaith Youth Core

Organised by: Interfaith Youth Core

Full Contact Details: 1111 N Wells St., Ste. 501 Chicago, IL 60610, Ph: (312) 573-8825, Email: info@ifyc.org

Funded by: Funding from various sources including United Religions Initiative, Council for a Parliament of the World's Religions, Interfaith Center of New York, Ford Foundation, The Jenesis Group etc.

Time Period of Initiative: Established in 1998; ongoing

Number of participants involved: In 2006-07, their Outreach Program reached more than 13,000 participants

Target Group: Young individuals from diverse ethnic and religious backgrounds.

Project Description: IFYC is structured around three main programmatic areas: *Public Advocacy*, *Outreach Education & Training*, and *Leadership*. These three programmatic areas work cohesively within the framework of its organisational goals, which are to build widespread public support for interfaith youth work; equip youth-focused institutions to positively engage their religious diversity; and cultivate long-term impact by emerging leaders in this movement.

IFYC's three main goals in promoting religious pluralism are:

Empowering young people: IFYC supports young leaders in interfaith work by providing them with multi media resources, skill based trainings, and intensive mentorship opportunities with the IFYC.

Equipping youth-focused institutions: IFYC acts as a resource for educational institutions by providing curriculum, interfaith work trainings, and consulting services to create a campus climate conducive to promoting religious pluralism.

Building a supportive public culture: IFYC creates public awareness of the critical need for inter-religious civic engagement through extensive media and community outreach and through relationships with government and policy institutions. IFYC strives to create a movement in which the broader public makes a commitment to promoting religious pluralism in their communities and in the world.

Two of their main events include:

Days of Interfaith Youth Service (DIYS) program which grew out of a vision from the first National Conference on Interfaith Youth Work in 2003. The DIYS model encourages young people to form a steering committee and organise service projects to benefit their community. The grassroots service projects are as varied and diverse as the people who plan and participate in them.

Outreach Education and Training Campus and Community Visits, which regularly works with college campuses and community organisations to build religious pluralism.

Successes and Challenges: The Challenge lies in overcoming traditional barriers of stereotypes in bringing about meaningful exchanges between people of different religions. The project has been hugely successful with its Outreach Education and Training program reaching 13,988 individuals across 34 campuses, 41 civic and faith organisations and 11 independent schools. Furthermore, it's DIYS program has expanded to thirty-four sites around the world, spanning three continents, five countries, and twelve U.S. states and the District of Columbia

What evaluation (if any) was conducted: As an international organisation, all it's programs are closely monitored and evaluated in a stringent manner to ensure its continued efficacy and success.

Initiative Title: Diversity and Dialogue

Organised by: Citizenship Foundation

Full Contact Details: James Sevitt, Diversity and Dialogue, Citizenship Foundation, 63 Gee Street, London EC1V 3RS, Ph: 020 7566 4138, Email:diversityanddialogue@citizenshipfoundation.org.uk

Funded by: It's a registered charity funded by private businesses and government funding

Time Period of Initiative: Established in 2004; ongoing projects

Number of participants involved: Hundreds in various towns around UK.

Target Group: Young people aged between 14-19 across UK.

Project Description: Diversity and Dialogue was conceived at a meeting of Christian, Jewish, Muslim and secular NGOs in July 2002. They thought about their potential to help counter current inter-religious tensions and their conclusion was a commitment to run an interfaith education project in partnership – Diversity and Dialogue. Diversity and Dialogue began work in 2004 and aims to build understanding and friendship between young people from different faiths and backgrounds in the UK. It develops new models of intercultural dialogue and co-operation. Diversity and Dialogue works with 14–19 year olds across the UK to build trust, address discrimination and foster more cohesive communities. The successful first phase of the project was completed in 2006 and a second phase of work has begun.

Some of their future work includes:

Diversity and Dialogue Spaces - The experiences of the first phase of the project suggest that young people with different faiths, views and backgrounds often lack a safe and neutral space in which to discuss issues that have the potential to be divisive and inflammatory. The Spaces project aims to facilitate such spaces and will initially set up

several pilot groups. These 'dialogue spaces' will also provide a structure for young people to work together constructively for change in their local communities, encouraging participants to address common concerns through campaigns or social action projects.

Urban-rural exchange - Diversity and Dialogue is hoping to pilot an urban-rural exchange programme, as a model for other schools to follow. This will involve pupils discussing issues of faith and identity over email and then developing a programme of joint activities.

Cohesive schools - Save the Children are taking forward a project involving students in developing effective policy and practice to promote cohesive schools. Work has begun in Trafford, where students from two schools are investigating their schools' race relations policies.

Successes and Challenges: Diversity and Dialogue's projects have been successful in encouraging young people to look outwards, beyond their immediate communities, and to start thinking about the huge challenges facing the planet. Through working together for global change participants have built local links and friendships which contribute to better community relations in their local areas.

What evaluation (if any) was conducted: Diversity and Dialogue is heavily reliant on participant input as well as feedback from young people in evaluating and redesigning their program. With this in mind, it has prepared a report on the opportunities and challenges of youth interfaith work in consultation with 124 young people living in multi-faith cities in England.

Initiative Title: FaithAction! Community Clear-up

Organised by: Together for Peace

Full Contact Details: Leeds Together for Peace, 'Fred Shed', 45 Westfield Road (Cordelia House) Burley, Leeds LS3 1DG, Ph: +44 (0) 113 350 8085/86

Funded by: Diversity and Dialogue

Time Period of Initiative: One-off event

Number of participants involved: 30

Target Group: 13-19 year olds as well as some young adults from various religious backgrounds.

Project Description: Part of the 'Together for Peace' festival (www.togetherforpeace.co.uk), the aim of FaithAction! was to bring young people of different faiths together for a day to help clear up litter from an estate in south Leeds. The idea was that the young people would have in common the shared value of looking after the environment, and through this they would come together, have fun and make a real difference to a small area in south Leeds.

The day was organised by Diversity and Dialogue in partnership with Groundwork, Leeds Faith in Schools, Middleton Methodist Church and Sinai Synagogue. The event was attended by 30 people: Christians and Jews from Leeds as well as some Israeli students. The event was aimed at 13-19 year olds and about half of the group was made up of this age group, but there were also some keen adults. Prior to the event representatives from the different faith based groups came together, along with Diversity and Dialogue staff, to organise the event and establish the shared values

Successes and Challenges: The litter clear up was extremely successful, filling a whole van with litter and making a visible improvement to areas of the estate. Arguably more important than this though was the young people making a really good impression with the residents on the estate and getting to know each other. Because there were only a small number of participants each made a real effort to get to know someone new and relationships were formed. It is particularly encouraging that youth leaders from the Synagogue and one of the churches have since got together and discussed common issues. This resulted in a joint activity for the young people collecting for World AIDS Day and more joint activities are planned for the future.

What evaluation (if any) was conducted: No formal evaluation was conducted except for direct verbal feedback from participants which indicated a positive response.

Initiative Title: Fairtrade Football (UK - Bradford)

Organised by: Save the Children, Christian Aid, Islamic Relief, Active Faith Communities

Full Contact Details: PO Box 57330 London E1 2WJ United Kingdom, Ph: 084526 26786, Email:

Funded by: United Co-operatives Ltd.

Time Period of Initiative: One-off event in March 2005.

Number of participants involved: 100 youths

Target Group: 10-16 year olds in Bradford district from different religious communities

Project Description: During Fairtrade Fortnight 2005 Save the Children, Christian Aid, Islamic Relief, Active Faith Communities and United Co-operatives organised a Fairtrade Football Tournament for young people across Bradford. This event brought young people from different faiths and backgrounds together to play football, learn about Fairtrade and meet each other. It involved around 80 young people between the ages of 12 and 16 from different parts of Bradford.

Process: Because the different agencies involved target different groups of young people, we were ideally placed for an event to bring people together. We recruited teams of players from different ethnic groups and parts of Bradford in three age groups: under 12, under 14 and under 16. Prior to the event we sent each team an information pack about the tournament (including a timetable and rules), and information about the agencies

involved and why they are promoting Fairtrade). On the day with each age group we facilitated a brief introduction to Fairtrade, played a mini tournament and held a presentation ceremony, awarding certificates, medals and Fairtrade footballs to participants.

Successes and Challenges: As a model of bringing people from different backgrounds together for a day's activities the event was very successful; the young people had a great deal of fun and all enjoyed participating. Moreover the planning and executing of the event brought together different agencies. All involved have built good working relationships and have since worked together on other activities which sends out a really positive message about how people from different faiths can work together. Through working together on this event, sustainable relationships have been made between different faith and development agencies.

What evaluation (if any) was conducted: N.A.