

Highfields Youth Outreach Project (H-YOP): Project Report – November 2010

A. Introduction

H-YOP was born out of the violent incidents in this area earlier this year between some African Caribbean/Dual Heritage and Somali young people. Representatives of Highfields Community Association and The Race Equality Centre were present at a meeting convened by Councillor Mohammed Dawood (Cabinet Lead for Community Cohesion and Spinney Hills Ward Councillor, Leicester City Council) at Highfields Centre on 28 April 2010 at which it was stated that the response of the Police in putting out more officers (both on foot and in patrol cars) was sufficient and appropriate. This view was also supported by senior Leicester City Council (LCC) officers present at that meeting, with the representative from the Anti-Social Behaviour Team stating that his team was not equipped to intervene in this particular scenario!

The glaringly inadequate nature of this approach was challenged and attention was drawn to:

- a marked decline in the local authority's youth work in this area over the last 6 years
- increasing concerns about the disengagement of Young People (YP) from youth services and their resultant and increasing proneness to become embroiled in anti-social, offending and criminal behaviour.

Indeed, long before the buzz words of community cohesion had entered the local and national vocabulary, Highfields Community Association (HCA) had in 1997 initiated the theme of **Celebrating Diversity and Unity in the Community** – a series of events arising out of an initial altercation between 2 YP from different ethnic origins and resulting in key local residents and workers initiating this approach to services in this area. Although pre-2004, we had ready access to the necessary youth work resources, this situation has considerably worsened over the last 6 years with a resultant and unchecked increase in tension and inter-ethnic conflict.

HCA's well established and long standing work with YP places us in strong position to successfully address risk factors which adversely impact on YP. HCA had initiated and developed the nationally acclaimed Highfields Compact (1997–2004) which was initially funded through the Single Regeneration Budget and subsequently, the Children's Fund. In the end of project evaluation, London Metropolitan University stated: *'Where Compact has proved unique and indeed inspirational is in its clear demonstration that social crime prevention can work....able to show crime among YP can be tackled meaningfully, in a proactive way and in a way that invests in YP while not criminalising them.... providing a responsive, culturally sensitive and inclusive service to the diverse communities...'*

Equally, The Race Equality Centre's (TREC) work with YP who had entered the criminal justice system, included the development of a 3-way mentoring approach (Catalyst Mentoring Project) in partnership with Leicester Youth Offending Team and a multi-agency steering group, to divert YP into education and training and out of criminal activity (2001-2004).

TREC's work with the Probation Service assisted in ensuring issues of discriminatory practices were addressed through the Black Prisoner Support Project (1994-2003). Outcomes included the creation of the National Body of Black Prisoners Support Projects and membership to the National Prison Service Race Advisory Group.

B. Background

Highfields and St Matthews has the highest proportion and numbers of children and young people of any area within Leicester. The 2001 Census identified Spinney Hills ward having 1,791 YP aged 15 – 19 years (8.43%, cf. Leicester average 7.36%) and 5,642 children aged 0 – 14 years (26.54%, cf. Leicester average 20.85%). The total number of YP aged 13 -19 years within our immediate reach is in excess of 2000 and it is predicted to increase over the next few years.

Many of these YP experience a range of problems, including low/no skills/qualifications, poverty of imagination, not knowing their potential/choices in life and have had little experience of the world of work. They might also have associated drug, alcohol and mental health problems and be without the support of a peer group/families and experience poor infrastructure support.

The majority of wards that form the Highfields area are in the bottom 5% of Lower Super Output Areas (LSOA), with two of the LSOAs being in the bottom 200 in the country and the worse two nationally for levels of income generation (IMD 2007). More than 9% of YP are in the NEET category (Leicester City Strategy Plan 2007). The Office for National Statistics recent study into populations at risk shows that LSOAs locally have high levels of at risk populations in the 0-15yrs and 16-24yrs age groups (ONS 2007).

Being both literally and metaphorically positioned in the heart of the Highfields community provides HCA/Highfields Centre with an extensive reach to young people, especially those who would not normally take up statutory services, and their families, carers and their wider social networks.

This reach is further strengthened by our local partners, with their respective close links with YP and their families from those specific communities.

Highfields Community Association/Highfields Centre has a long and successful track record of developing/providing innovative services to meet specific local needs and helping local people to develop themselves, their families/communities, with success due to their hard work, our support/guidance and within a framework of mutual self help to socially and economically regenerate locally disadvantaged communities.

Highfields Centre was built with £5m funding from Sport England, Learning and Skills Council, East Midlands Development Agency and Government Office East Midlands. HCA has worked with these agencies and Leicester City Council to assume community governance of the new centre, with the agreed transfer date of 1 December 2010.

The new centre provides an extensive range of services, from crèche/playgroup/parent and toddler sessions through to after-school care, youth clubs, adult learning, advice (including jobs) and to the new arts and sports services (gym/sports hall and studios for aerobics, digital arts, film/video editing, music/recording, IT and performance arts theatre).

C. Project Development

HCA & TREC's proposal to conduct some immediate outreach work, including contact with the parents of some of those young people was identified as one of the agreed action points at the 28 April 2010 meeting held at Highfields Centre.

The resultant outreach work and contact with parents highlighted the need for an on-going engagement with those young people to understand their concerns, provide alternative channels

for their engagement and to begin a process of understanding and accommodating each other without resorting to violence and anti-social behaviour.

With the advent of the warmer weather, it was imperative to get this project immediately started and we identified 2 experienced and qualified workers from each of those two communities to initially conduct some outreach work with the respective young people and then, over the Summer holiday period, to bring them together in undertaking a range of arts and sports activities with a view to their exploration and understanding of each other.

Although the funding for this work was not 'confirmed' until 1 July 2010, the initial planning meeting attended by representatives of HCA and TREC and the project workers was held on Sunday 27 June 2010

1. For the first 2 weeks commencing 5th July, the workers (2 African Caribbean and 2 Somali) were tasked with establishing contact with the relevant African Caribbean, Dual Heritage and Somali YP
2. Initially, the workers made contact with YP from their own ethnic groups
3. The sessions were worked out on the basis of late afternoons, evenings and weekends
4. The target groups were the YP involved in the disturbances but also, bearing in mind the other potential conflicts (eg. between Afghan & East European YP, especially during the Ramzan period)
5. By week 3, some arts & sports sessions were arranged at HC, with an initial short activity trip to more firmly establish the links with and between group members. These were arranged on the basis of ethnic specific activities at first but with a view to mixing it up as confidence built up between the groups
6. First 12 weeks of project was taken up with outreach & activities – final 3 weeks were spent on evaluation & compiling report & dissemination event
7. The on-going need for the project's continuation was also highlighted!
8. A second planning meeting was held on **Tuesday 29 June 2010** and it was taken up with working through strategies for engaging the relevant YP and which pair of workers will cover which area and at what times/days, etc.
9. Following a meeting with the LCC Outreach team, the times of the H-YOP outreach sessions in the Highfields area was arranged between 6 to 8pm on Tuesdays and 4 to 6pm on Saturdays/Sundays and between 5 to 7pm on Fridays in the Highfields area and 4 to 6pm on Saturdays in the St Matthews area
10. Workers were also advised about completing the sessional monitoring form and a document setting out the risk assessment factors which needed to be considered by the outreach workers, as well as the issue of ID cards before the first session
11. A third planning meeting was held on **Tuesday 20th July 2010** and the initial responses from the Somali YP was as follows:
 - a. YP contacted mostly aged 16 – 20/21yrs
 - b. numbers contacted varied over 4 sessions but positive response, including at new 'Cage' (play area) in Victoria Park and St Matthews
 - c. Original incidents giving rise to incidents two months ago were seen as a carry on from incidents 2 and 3 years ago
 - d. Some YP involved in incidents were now seen playing together on park

- e. Some Somali YP using HC for youth sessions and sports but most were not – also, not using any other facility in the area
- f. Issue of lack of trust in agencies and workers – also, other venues too near mosques and places where their parents and uncles meet
- g. They would be interested in film and music sessions and also, gym
- h. May be useful to start with an external trip

The equivalent report from the African Caribbean/Dual Heritage YP was as follows:

- i. YP contacted mostly aged 14 – 20/21yrs
- j. Most YP don't use existing services/agencies in the area or indeed, outside the area
- k. Some had been to HC youth sessions but general lack of trust in youth workers
- l. Also, issue of safety – most times, vastly outnumbered
- m. Hence, chill out in own/friends' homes
- n. Accounts of race/gang 'war' between AC & Somali YP well over the top!
- o. Conflict situation has eased, leading to, for example, joint football sessions on Victoria Park
- p. They would be interested in film and music sessions
- q. May be useful to start with an external trip
- r. For the next 2 weeks (w/c 19th & 26th July), organise separate activities for both groups in film/video, music and gym (the latter for Somali YP)
- s. For the 4 weeks in August, activities were to have been arranged on a joint basis, with mix of staff & YP but this was deferred
- t. If YP willing and able to join existing activities, then H-YOP workers to encourage and support them to do so
- u. One AC YP was at that time, subjected to a Youth Offending Service administered curfew, leading to liaison with YOS to enable YP to participate in agreed activities

12. A fourth planning meeting was held on **Friday 20th August 2010** and it was noted that from the Somali group:

- a. More YP interested than H-YOP was able to cater for
- b. 12 YP in group, initially involved in paintballing trip – an enjoyable session
- c. This was followed by 2 Wednesday sessions – planning video session on labelling
- d. YP insisted on using their own ideas, as opposed to going along with workers' ideas!
- e. 3 more sessions held in that week to work on film project

The equivalent report from the African Caribbean/Dual Heritage YP was as follows:

- f. Initial canoeing trip to Outdoor Pursuits Centre very successful – 8 YP in group
- g. This was followed by a music session and then, a film session on theme of 'The Ends' (how situations occur and develop and how they should develop)
- h. Some discontinuity in terms of group members, with some members going away

- i. Both groups' members were in HC on Wednesday 11th August, with members talking amongst themselves.
- 13.** A fifth planning meeting was held on **Monday 20th September 2010** and it was reported that:
- a. One of the Somali workers had moved to Cardiff and a replacement worker was appointed to take that post
 - b. Filming completed and uploaded onto Macs, with editing to be completed by 24th Sept and the finished film to be shared with all members of group for final approval
 - c. Joint sports session (basketball and football) planned with both groups on Saturday 9th October (subsequently changed to Sunday 10th October due to the EDL related issues on the Saturday) from 11am to 3pm – **both groups' films were to be shared with the other group's members.** Group members were mixed up into 'joint' teams and following sports session, each group's films were shown and refreshments provided
- 14.** A sixth and final planning meeting was held on **Tuesday 12th October 2010** when the main focus was on the dissemination event, including the compilation of the Project Report and on completing a funding application for the Project to be continued, albeit with a different focus. It was also agreed to incorporate the following elements into the new bid: payment for YP working on project; connecting with YP from other communities; taking finished product and learning to other settings (eg. Schools, Youth clubs, etc); accreditation of training

D. Reflections – Project Workers 1



AC1: *"These things are safe still, but what happens when it's done? We need these things running all year around".*

AC2: *"Why is it they invest in 'nuff feds, but they never invest in us? If we weren't on the road, we could be elsewhere doing some constructive stuff we enjoy instead of getting into beef situations".*

AC3: *"We just need other stuff to do innit! Road aint good but what else have we got to do? People only want to get involved in doing stuff for us after it's too late and stuff has got out of hand. We aint stupid, we know that people are expecting us to fail, but if we had more opportunity to do other stuff we would show people what we can do.*

AC4: "This project was safe, but like always it's gonna done without any thought about what happens next. I don't trust mans too much so I keep myself to myself, but this ting has made me see that them mans worry about the same kind of things as we do. We aint gonna be the best of friends, but we don't want to be enemies. You need to work on the younger ones and give them things to do so they get to know each other".

Following the violent incidents that happened on the streets of Highfields over the early summer of 2010 between two groups, one African Caribbean and the other Somali, I (Naji Richards), Crazeski Hakeem and a few other community workers were approached to specifically target those groups of young people that was involved to see if there could be some way of bringing the two sides together to understand and help to end the conflict. After an initial meeting, we suggested ideas and developed a plan to approach these young people to see if we could help them bridge the gap and see what could be done to prevent a repeat of the violence that had occurred. Two groups of workers including myself and a colleague and another group of 2 Somali community workers then went out on the streets of Highfields and St Matthews over a period of a few days to approach these groups to see if we could get some background and history of the situation, and find out what ways they themselves would want to engage in a project that would address the issues that surfaced. Each group was very responsive and both agreed to come into the Highfields Centre to take part in projects that reflected their views about the situation. It was agreed that each group would initially work together in their own groups, as there was still some distrust between the groups, as the situation did not start with the summer incident, but had been brewing with various separate incidents over a period of about 2 to 3 years.

From the initial outreach work and over the first few weeks, we worked with the African Caribbean youth on a mixtape/video project, and also took them on a canoeing trip. They chose music/video as they and others are aspiring musicians and vocalists (MC's) and had already started planning a mixtape project but hadn't got the idea off the ground. During the sessions, issues concerning the situation was discussed and addressed, and those views were put to music. We started recording the music and got about 5 tracks and a video production completed. In an attempt to bring the two sides together, a football match was arranged, which both sides attended, but with limited numbers as there was still an element of distrust, but no hostility. A continuation of the project, which is greatly needed, is currently being looked at, as there is still much scope left for engaging both sides, and to address the younger members of each group so that problems can be addressed from an earlier point to stop situations like the one that brought about this project.

E. Reflections – Project Workers 2



H-YOP came about as a result of the incidents that took place over the spring period of 2010 between young African Caribbean and young Somali people who mainly live in the Highfields area of Leicester.

Abdulkadir Hassan and Mahdi Mohammed were approached to undertake some “outreach” work with young Somali people in the Highfields area. Our main objective was to create an initial contact with the YP and find out what was happening on a “street level”. This was achieved over a 2 week period with nearly 10 hours spent with YP in their local chill out spots.

The outreach workers gained the trust of the young people and the young people opened up to conversations more easily. Throughout these conversations, we introduced summer activities running at the Highfields Centre and proposed for them to come with their own ideas. The young people really took an interest and attended a registration day which was followed by an all paid for day out on a Paintball trip. Feedback from this was that they enjoyed a day out away from everyday life and being able to bond more closely with the group they were forming.

Young people then took an active role in developing the idea for their film during 2 weekly sessions which lasted 3 hours per session. The idea was to make a short film based on what they believe is stopping them from being heard, which ended being called “Labels”. This seemed to go quite well, as it differed from the African Caribbean group, and it was something that they could visualise. The young people were so active that we agreed to add an extra day and make it 3 weekly sessions.

Abdulkadir left 2 months after the start of the project due to a job move to Cardiff. He was then replaced by Hamza Abib who all the young people were already familiar with, so the change happened rather smoothly. It took an intensive few weeks to produce the short film and edit it down to its final end result. They each had a part to play in the editing of the film, as they would have to feedback if the film ended up satisfactory to their initial ideas.

Once the film was completed, we held a joint session between the African Caribbean group and the Somali group using sports and food as the medium. The group mixed very well although there was a small turnout from both groups. We also managed to share both finished products with each other at the joint session.

The overall feedback from the group was extremely positive, as they believed they had been given the opportunity to express themselves using creative outlets. They enjoyed being able to just have something in common with the African Caribbean group, which was sports, which involves discipline and respect. One of the young people added: “I have learnt so much, but also, felt that no matter what tensions there are, it can be resolved if we try to be mature about it”.

F. In lieu of a conclusion

H-YOP’s outcome has been a reduction in anti-social behaviour and inter-ethnic violence in this area and an increased engagement of young people in positive activities. Although this application was for a time limited project of 4 months, the **need for this work to be continued** will need to be actively pursued.

Given the young people involved in the recent incidents, information about the project was communicated to them directly through the outreach work. Their take up of the project's services was also highly dependent on the credibility and local knowledge of the workers employed.

As marginalised young people with the additional elements of being in the not in education, employment or training (NEET) category, the target group needed to be convinced that this project was not just a tokenistic response. A large part of overcoming this attitude was again achieved through the credibility and local knowledge of the workers employed.

We hope the need for **this cost effective way of working with young people will be recognised in the long overdue roll out of Integrated Youth Support Services** and the following **legislative requirements** will be adhered to

1. White Paper (2005) and subsequent Education and Inspections Act 2006, set out new role for Local Authorities in spearheading developments relating to Every Child Matters (ECM) and its related 5 Outcomes - **Local Authority is not seen as a (primary or sole) provider** as reinforced by the Children's Plan of December 2007
2. Effective service commissioning will include private, voluntary and third sector providers and **not an "old-style command and control approach"**
3. **Recognition that the current government is likely to encourage even more local autonomy**
4. **Increased involvement of service users and the wider community in decision making** relating to current and future provision
5. **Separation of purchaser and provider** and an **encouragement of a diversity of provision that builds on and extends the range of providers particularly in the voluntary and community sectors**
6. **Requirement to be family centred and systemic in approach** – e.g. understanding that meeting the needs of children and young people means being joined up with services for adults and older people. There has been an expansion nationally of services, for example, that support adults in terms of parenting and achieving economic independence
7. **Encouragement and pressure to move to local solutions and to involve communities in the use of resources and decision making.**