

Diversity: a summary

This is one of four papers presenting learning and practical guidance from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation's Neighbourhood Programme (2002–6). Each paper is based on a theme that was important to several communities. The programme worked with 20 neighbourhoods in England, Scotland and Wales, bringing them together into a learning network and providing extra resources. These included a small funding pot, support from experienced independent facilitators, networking opportunities and access to information.

This project concentrates on neighbourhoods containing people from different ethnic backgrounds. As the number of these communities increases, finding ways of living together becomes more challenging. The experiences of the neighbourhoods taking part in the joint project on diversity indicated that:

- Positive bonding within ethnic groups and bridging between them are equally important when building cohesive neighbourhoods. Building cohesive action in diverse communities takes time and patience.
- Women are important community leaders. It is important that women from black and minority ethnic communities get involved in neighbourhood action.
- Communities need to see a benefit in working together. Resources targeted on the poorest areas may cause friction if the 'next to poorest' feel neglected. This friction can be more destructive if the second area contains a low-income, white population.
- Community tensions can exist between different groups. Well-established Afro-Caribbean and Pakistani communities may see new arrivals as competitors for space and resources.
- Building positive relations with the local media helps ensure that community achievements are publicised and the reporting of problems is fair.
- Celebrations, festivals and food are good ways to build bridges and encourage positive responses to cultural diversity.
- Working with other service providers can cause frustration if these are ill-prepared to work with neighbourhood organisations representing diverse community interests.

Background

Any community that identifies with a particular neighbourhood is likely to be diverse in its interests, resources and aspirations. Much of the discussion around diversity in residential neighbourhoods has resulted from concerns about ethnic difference, with upsurges in interest from policy-makers in the wake of sporadic conflicts.

Community cohesion and diversity emerged as an issue of concern for a number of the neighbourhoods at the first networking event of the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF) Neighbourhood Programme. Yet few of these neighbourhoods had highlighted this aspect of work in their action plans. It was agreed that diversity was an appropriate theme to be explored collectively in more depth as a cross-cutting study.

Three main case studies were identified: St Pauls, Caia Park and East Pollokshields. Broad Street, Castle Vale and Integrate (Todmorden) were included as associated case studies. Information was gathered from each project and then explored through an initial interview with a key person in the three principal areas and in two of the associated neighbourhoods. Fifteen in-depth interviews with stakeholders were then held in the three primary neighbourhoods. The initial findings were reviewed at a meeting of all six projects in May 2006. A detailed report was produced in July 2006.

The project neighbourhoods

St Pauls is the most diverse neighbourhood in Bristol. Community tensions are heightened by an uneasy relationship between the new communities coming into the area from East Africa and the long-standing Afro-Caribbean community in St Pauls. This relationship includes 'turf wars' in the local drugs trade.

Caia Park in Wrexham is one of the largest housing estates in Wales with a population of around 12,000. The core of the neighbourhood is local authority rented housing, with private estates being developed round the periphery. Caia Park is currently experiencing a large influx of migrant workers from Poland, with smaller numbers from Portugal and the Czech Republic. The Caia Park Partnership is tackling the problem of vulnerable workers, who lack local support services, language needs and benefit eligibility. There is a sense of urgency in seeking to integrate these new arrivals.

Half of the 8,000 inhabitants of **East Pollokshields** in Glasgow are from black and minority ethnic communities. This is the largest proportion of any neighbourhood in Scotland. The area is a mix of tenures. The low-income white community lives principally in the social housing estates, the Pakistani families in privately rented or owner-

occupied property. Housing association tenure is more mixed. A small, previously more affluent area is gradually attracting back numbers of young professionals. There are very few contacts between the white residents and the Asian communities at present.

The Broad Street area of Swindon has become increasingly diverse in the last 15 years. It is the town's 'reception area', with settlements of Muslims from Pakistan and Sri Lanka, and significant communities from Turkey, Goa, the Caribbean and St Helena. Swindon's booming economy on the M4 corridor and Broad Street's location near bus and train stations, along with the availability of rooms in larger converted properties and the informal community support networks, all make Broad Street an accessible point of arrival for new migrants. Presently, some residents report heightened community tensions. Others argue that there is no open conflict between black and minority ethnic (BME) and white residents other than some low-level friction between different groups of young people.

Castle Vale was a failing council estate that has been transformed through the transfer of its housing stock to a housing action trust. This has led to significant new investment over the past ten years and a recent overwhelming vote from residents to establish their own community housing association rather than revert to the management of Birmingham's housing department. Currently, 8 per cent of Castle Vale's population is from BME communities, compared with an overall city figure of 35 per cent. The Castle Vale Community Housing Association is currently making plans to increase diversity in the area.

Integrate is a project based in Todmorden, West Yorkshire, where a BME community, principally Pakistani Kashmiris, is relatively isolated and politically weak. The group's activities are aimed at helping the Asian community play a more active role in the life of the town. Projects involving younger people and women aim to increase community contacts. A careful approach to the editor of the local newspaper led to the group achieving more positive publicity, particularly in respect of their efforts to support the victims of the 2005 earthquake in Kashmir.

Promising practice identified through the joint project

Both central and local government have policies on positive action, achieving equality and respecting diversity. Success often relies on the efforts of community organisations. The JRF diversity report has found that many of the projects studied are making innovative contributions to addressing issues of diversity in their neighbourhoods. And they are doing so with a dynamism too often missing from local government.

The creative activities encountered fell broadly into three groups:

- networking and celebration;
- consultation, partnerships and equalities; and
- 'pioneer' services.

An important element of positive networking is to recognise the value of the contribution of people who just want to get things done. Formal networks can get bogged down in constitutions, meetings and unproductive debate. Broad Street used the stimulus of the JRF Programme to bring together an informal group of active people from different backgrounds, races and faiths. This group of 'dynamo people' identified their common interests and concerns, particularly the problems of community safety, prostitution and drug dealing. The group promoted a 'Streets for Living' programme with food, song and dance. This was followed by a successful community event involving people from different ethnic backgrounds all of whom committed themselves to bringing ten of their neighbours and friends. The hall was packed with over 250 people and the event has sparked off a programme of information and education on issues of local concern.

Food festivals have also proved a successful way of celebrating diversity in Todmorden, St Pauls and East Pollokshields. Some have been linked to specific celebrations, such as Eid and Divali. In Todmorden this has involved opening the mosque for social events and explaining Islam to non-Muslims. In St Pauls, the most successful events have been in neutral spaces such as a local park, where groups have enough space to feel comfortable.

Most groups have found that women have proved the most effective organisers. East Pollokshields attracted over 800 women, including many from Asian communities, to a Women's Day event. Despite this specific success, research indicates the continuing need to engage with women from these communities who, partly as a result of cultural constraints, remain harder to involve.

Broad-based consultation has also proved to be an effective means of promoting positive diversity. In East Pollokshields, the Southside Housing Association took the initiative and appointed an Asian community development worker. The association also conducted a participative community survey, which got people from the different communities talking to each other and contributing to an overall Pollokshields East Partnership. Southside Housing Association's mix of tenants from different ethnic backgrounds meant it was well placed to promote these positive initiatives. Consultation showed that the local authority was supporting a small number of groups in the

area, but without an overall strategic plan. This meant that some needs were well catered for but others, such as opportunities for younger residents, were not. The consultation and subsequent partnership building also highlighted common ground and common interests across the different communities. Concerns about community safety and youth gangs, play facilities, local shopping, parking and speeding vehicles were found to be shared by all residents. Despite this recognition of common concerns, progress in Pollokshields has been slow. The area has no history of recognising and supporting diversity and it is taking a long time for people to feel comfortable about working together.

In contrast, St Pauls has a long history of consultation, confrontation and celebration of diversity. The St Pauls Unlimited project is now able to work with the local authority and the police to find ways of reaching residents who have been less involved in community affairs, such as door-to-door consultations. St Pauls Unlimited now provides a way for the different groups to have an input into planning control, lettings policies, an 'opportunity to buy' housing programme for poorer tenants, and improvements to local parks and other amenities. Integrate, in Todmorden, also found a door-to-door survey of value in gathering views from Asian residents.

The Castle Vale Community Housing Association is also developing its policy on equalities and is appointing staff to encourage diversity. The Association has affiliated to the Birmingham Race Action Partnership to assist it in this. It has also recognised the importance of inter-generational work, organising joint activities involving older and younger residents, and supporting a local youth council.

Caia Park Partnership has taken a particular initiative in developing bilingual advice and English courses for new migrants. An important aspect of this work is the opportunity it provides for migrants with good English skills to play an active part as volunteers in assisting the project. Caia Park has employed a Polish woman, a qualified translator in English and Polish, to provide support sessions for migrant workers on two days a week. Caia Park has also teamed up with the Workers Education Association to offer English courses, supporting over 70 Polish and Portuguese residents each week. Caia Park has succeeded in winning follow-on funding for its diversity work with migrants: the bilingual advocacy work is now funded for five years, and a programme that helps migrant families avoid homelessness has 12 months' support.

St Pauls has supported diversity by establishing a 'community advocate' scheme to reduce community tensions between the well-established Afro-Caribbean community and recent arrivals from Somalia. One project

mediates between groups of teenagers from the two communities. St Pauls Unlimited employs three bilingual workers to provide advice to Somali and Urdu speakers.

Learning points

- An effective basis for collaboration between diverse groups can mean starting from common ground rather than immediately attempting to reconcile differences.
- Building trust between people who have lived separate lives takes time.
- Cultural issues may hinder the involvement of women in some communities, but it is important to encourage women to engage in local activities.
- Efforts to encourage and respect diversity must involve building links with key agencies. This may not always be a comfortable process, especially if the quality of the service provided by such agencies is open to challenge. Equally, the service agencies may not respect the work of the voluntary or community organisations or they may be unwilling to pay for it.
- Voluntary and community organisations, especially those supported by shared experience, are often capable of more flexible and effective responses to problems than the bigger public agencies. In identifying solutions that may cut across and refresh the way mainstream services are provided, these voluntary and community organisations represent good value for money.
- Policy-makers should recognise the skills and capacity of neighbourhood-based voluntary and community organisations. In particular, any resources made available to these groups should be adequate to allow them to develop positive action in support of diversity without having to sacrifice other projects in doing so.

Signposts to further information

There are many web sites to guide groups wishing to explore the issue of diversity. In addition to the JRF's (www.jrf.org.uk) these include:

■ www.renewal.net

This the online guide launched by the Neighbourhood Renewal Unit to provide information about what works in neighbourhood renewal. The site includes 'how to' guides, case studies, research papers and project summaries. Be careful to note the date of postings on the site as some case studies are old and have not been updated.

■ www.audit-commission.gov.uk

The Audit Commission's site offering a wealth of material including a wide range of inspection reports giving fascinating detail of the performance of local authorities, housing associations and other service providers. The Audit Commission produces these evidence-based reports to help drive improvement in public services.

■ www.cre.gov.uk

This is the website of the Commission for Racial Equality, whose challenge is to work for a just and integrated society where diversity is valued.

■ www.neighbourhoodmanagement.net

This brings you to the site of the National Neighbourhood Management Network. An action team report on community cohesion and diversity is in preparation.

■ www.lga.gov.uk

This is the Local Government Association website from which you can get a number of reports addressing issues of diversity and community cohesion.

■ www.barrowcadbury.org.uk

This is the website of the Barrow Cadbury Trust, which has championed the need for positive action in respect of diversity over many years.

■ Some specialist websites provide important information on issues of importance with regard to diversity. One such is www.bme-mentalhealth.co.uk. Issues of mental illness are explored as an aspect of the need for community cohesion and respect for diversity.

■ Similarly, the housing associations charitable trust (hact; www.hact.org.uk) runs a number of projects supporting refugees and asylum seekers in the context of recognising diversity.