

The Holme Wood development project

Communities Bradford

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In 2004, JRF made a ten-year commitment to work in Bradford. We work in partnership with others to make a positive difference to the people in the city, and improve our understanding of issues in a diverse community.

This summary highlights a project that worked with different cultural and ethnic groups living on the Holme Wood housing estate in Bradford, to find ways to improve relationships between them and unite the community.



JOSEPH ROWNTREE
FOUNDATION

Key points at a glance

This project looked at relationships between different cultural and ethnic groups living on the Holme Wood housing estate in Bradford. It found ways of improving these relationships and uniting the community.

- Issues affecting relationships between different groups in Holme Wood tend to be because of people and groups being isolated rather than conflict between different groups.
- In areas with relatively small and varied minority communities, such as Holme Wood, the relationship of the individual person to their local community is important for building a more united community.
- People clearly need support when they have recently moved into an area, especially in places with growing minority and ethnic communities like Holme Wood.
- Racism needs to be considered alongside wider urban issues. Racial intolerance and harassment in Holme Wood reflect specific concerns about the coming in of people of Asian backgrounds; these concerns are common in Bradford.
- Social and moral support can play an important role when people feel isolated, left-out and unable to bond with their local community.
- Residents need to have a say in what happens in their area and have their views represented to local professionals providing direct services (e.g. the police).
- Crime and antisocial behaviour affect relationships between groups in a community. These are not separate problems and can leave residents feeling vulnerable and isolated from the rest of their local community.

I'm hoping that it leads to the housing trust and the police being able help people in a more meaningful way. We need to link up the services, but we also have to get agreements with some local services to take forward some of these recommendations.

(Huw Illingworth, development worker, Holme Wood)

Background

It is not our differences that divide us.
It is our inability to recognise, accept,
and celebrate those differences.

(Audrey Lorde, American poet and teacher, 1934–1992)

The Holme Wood housing estate was built in the 1950s on the south-east edge of Bradford. Traditionally, its population has been white British. In recent years, new groups from different ethnic backgrounds have moved into Holme Wood. This has not only changed the make-up of the local population, but also increased tensions between the settled community and newcomers.

Aims of the project

The initial aims of the Holme Wood Development Project were to:

- increase understanding between different cultural groups living on the same estate ('community cohesion') and provide opportunities for people from these groups to work together on local projects;
- decrease hostility between different cultural groups on the estate and test the potential for using an Intercultural Communication and Leadership School (ICLS) to do this;
- connect people living in Holme Wood with people from Muslim and other communities in Bradford;

People feeling positive about
their neighbours makes a huge
difference to how they will live
together in the future.

- help new communities settle in and find ways to build relationships and ease tensions between older and newer communities.

As part of the Holme Wood Development Project, the Active Faith Communities Programme aimed to use communication, community involvement and other methods that have been used successfully elsewhere to break down barriers between different groups of people.

Key questions

Among the many questions asked during the project, some of the best were about finding new and practical ways of supporting people when they have just moved into the area and need care and understanding to help them settle in.

Questions considered during the research included:

- What are the causes of tension that bring about unrest between new and settled communities in Holme Wood?
- How do local services, within the area and the district, provide solutions and support to ease these tensions?

Project activities

To strengthen the community in Holme Wood, the project needed two stages:

1. it looked at the relationships between different groups on the estate and where there were tensions and problems;
2. this information was used to run a programme of activities to improve relationships between residents.

The research leading up to the community activities included talking to service providers, including statutory, voluntary and faith bodies, to gather information, inform the project and get to know residents from different cultural backgrounds living on the estate.

development worker Huw Illingworth explains how the project unfolded and evolved over time. Whilst it set out to achieve its aims in a straightforward, practical way, the project developed with the needs of residents, taking into account all the complexities, problems and preconceptions surrounding the Holme Wood area.

At a ground level, the project considered day-to-day issues faced by people living on the estate. Holme Wood is subject to general problems that occur in any housing estate, such as vandalism, bullying and antisocial behaviour. An important aspect of research was overcoming the idea that the problems on the Holme Wood estate are solely the result of tensions between new migrants and the settled community.

According to Huw, getting residents involved in the project was one of the main challenges. Interestingly, the people who eventually became involved were those who had experienced the most problems settling in to the estate. Participants included white British residents

The original aims changed from working with just young adults to all members of the community. We went about our research in a different way to how we imagined. Some of our initial observations changed and it became more about finding out about the current picture directly from the residents.

(Huw Illingworth, development worker, Holme Wood)

Antisocial problems take on a different meaning if you're new to the country. Vandalism and racism feel very different if you are a part of the community. It's much more frightening if you're new to the area; the issues take on a different meaning

(Huw Illingworth, development worker, Holme Wood)

who had lived on the estate for years, some having been born there. Others were members of migrant communities who had also lived on the estate for some years and included refugees, mostly from various white and African backgrounds.

It was also important that the project was well co-ordinated with other schemes in the area, such as the work being done by the Holme Wood Community Council and St Christopher's Church, to help settle newer communities in the area.

The project actively encouraged people from the community to get involved. This included:

- one-to-one meetings with residents and their families to get their views on living in the area and encourage them to join the project and help design the activities for themselves and others;
- trips and excursions to allow residents to get to know each other away from the area, to help them communicate with each other and overcome any barriers, misunderstandings and prejudices between them;
- small group meetings to help residents to develop an informal self-help support network, so residents could support each other as well as other new arrivals in the area in the future;

- residents taking part in a documentary film made by the project, which explored local issues.

Project outcomes

The project achieved a number of clear and immediate outcomes, which can potentially be developed and sustained in the future.

The allotment

Creating an allotment in Holme Wood means there is a dedicated space within the community, for the community. The allotment has made a significant impact on the quality of life of users and a difference to the groups who have pushed the project forward.

Away days

Trips out with residents to places away from the district, such as Bolton Abbey, have helped develop communication and understanding between the different people attending.

Bringing people together who are in the same boat is very important; giving each other emotional support, offering practical things to each other such as furniture – just getting together and having a chat with each other for the first time makes a big difference.

For people who have been through similar difficulties, sharing stories and helping each other really helps.



The local allotment

Support groups

Vulnerable residents, such as refugees with children, have benefited from the support network created by the project and from having access to different services and someone to talk to about their concerns.

The community council

Some of the project participants have become significantly involved in their local area and are now representing the views and interests of their communities at the community council.

Neighbourhood wardens

Neighbourhood wardens have taken on a more proactive role in the area. Project leaders gave advice and talked them through the issues, and they now offer a range of practical help to residents.

Discussion groups

The focus groups and discussion groups brought people together for the first time to talk about common concerns facing the community and possible solutions. One of the most positive outcomes was the setting up of a support network for the community, where residents are encouraged to talk about issues they face and provide support for newcomers to the estate.

The Holme Wood film

The making of a documentary film about the Holme Wood estate has provided a natural outlet for people to speak about the area and their lives in it.

I have learned a lot about my neighbours from getting involved in this project – it's been an eye opener in a really good way.

(Holme Wood resident)

Even simple things make life worth living for many people. The away day, for some people, provided a neutral space to consider how the group may work together in the future.

(Huw Illingworth, development worker, Holme Wood)

Lessons from the project

A final report on the project identified important findings, which are relevant not only to Holme Wood but also to other efforts to improve community relations in similar circumstances.

Relationship of the individual to the community

In areas with relatively small and varied minority communities, the relationship of the individual person to the wider community becomes a key issue. In Holme Wood, the priority needs to be the common bond of individual residents and families with the community as a whole, as opposed to focusing on group conflict.

The key services in this respect are the police and housing and general neighbourhood support groups (offering moral and social as well as material support and advice). This finding is backed up by the concerns and needs expressed by new residents themselves.

Intervention in the early stages of residency

There is a clear need for interventions in the early stages of residency, particularly in areas with growing ethnic minority communities like Holme Wood. One resident described how people can develop serious detachment and resentment towards an area in the first six months of living there, which is hard to overcome. This leaves the resident with a permanent desire to 'get out'.

Early stages of residency are crucial to people building a positive view of their adopted community. Efforts need to be made to make sure personal and social comfort and support is offered to isolated residents at this stage. Key

people can inform larger service providers about people with urgent or high levels of need, so they can respond to specific cases as well as providing a general service.

Racial intolerance and harassment

In smaller communities within a bigger urban area, in this case Holme Wood in Bradford, racial intolerance and harassment reflect specific concerns and prejudices. In Holme Wood, like many areas in Bradford, there is a high level of prejudice directed toward the Asian community, stemming from concerns about arrivals from this group. This is an issue for Holme Wood's relationship to the rest of the city, and its internal relationships mean Asian families are unable to settle on the estate. Reports of racist attitudes towards other ethnic minority communities have been noted, and should not be dismissed, but do not seem to reflect a broad culture on the estate.

Attention needs to be paid to the ethnic background of individuals and families being housed in Holme Wood. There is evidently greater hostility toward those of South Asian background or relatively similar appearance. In these cases, families may well need extra support. Any assessment of the level of racial intolerance on the estate should take into account the wider social make-up of the city and the history of different ethnic groups living there.

Individual isolation

Social and moral support are crucial where individual isolation and alienation are stopping people from bonding with their local community. Support from other local residents, particularly those in a similar position or with similar backgrounds, can play a role here. Quality services, which value moral and personal support, can achieve better outcomes than the traditional direct delivery of core services. This could simply involve an emphasis on informal and personal relationships between service providers (professionals) and residents.

It is only through such relationships that subtle differences can be identified between strong sociable families with the ability to impose themselves on the community and settle through force of will and those who lack confidence and are more likely to withdraw and detach themselves.

Advocacy between residents and key services

It is important that people feel they have advocates (representatives) who can express their views to professionals who provide direct services, such as the police. In general, Holme Wood is able to provide this, but there needs to be greater trust among residents, and between residents and services.

Informal relationships and advocacy can play a role in identifying needs and helping people feel supported and valued, particularly in the early stages of residency. Where advocacy services exist to allow people to have their say, residents need the confidence and knowledge to use them at an early stage.

Crime and antisocial behaviour

Crime and antisocial behaviour need to be included in discussions about community relationships. Often carried out by children and young people, this behaviour leaves residents feeling vulnerable, isolated and negative about their local community. Many people assume these issues are separate from the matter of how different groups get on with each other.

Building a stronger community needs bonds between individuals and groups within that community – so the consequences of antisocial behaviour and the importance of support for those affected cannot be ignored. A list of service agreements with local groups and ongoing activities that help implement these recommendations have been put together in response to this project's research.

Residents' learning

The project also had major lessons for residents:

- Over time, residents became more aware of what a community could offer them and learnt about other people in their area.
- Residents now understand the importance of having a voice and being represented at the community council.
- Communication with other residents is valued more (one-to-one or a group discussion).
- Residents are more aware of agencies and authorities that can make decisions about the well-being of the area as a whole.
- There is a better understanding of the area, where many of the divisions and sub-groups are no different from issues faced by the city as a whole.
- The community has an understanding of what 'cohesion' really means in an area like Holme Wood, and where this fits into the city's overall plan.

The future: funding and sustainability

As with any community development project, sustainability is an inevitable question that needs to be addressed almost from the outset. There are plans to sustain the Holme Wood development project and keep the various

groups and activities going in the future. Key agencies in the district have been consulted and could put in place measures to help the community in the short term. A group has been set up called Holme Wood Ethnic Minorities, led by residents who have been involved in the project, which now meets regularly.

Similarly, service providers have been told how they can maximise support for the community by working together more effectively. The local Housing Trust have made an agreement to be more informed about issues facing new communities, as well as how they can be more proactive in the immediate future and long term. The most important aspect of sustaining this kind of support is making sure residents continue to be represented at a level where important decisions about the Holme Wood estate are made.

For anyone looking at this project from the outside, it is clear that it has been about empowering a community to unite in a new way, that has not happened until now. In doing so, barriers have been broken down and stereotypes challenged. The Holme Wood community is showing welcome signs of change.

The future is a lot brighter for this community. I am feeling more positive about moving forward.

(Holme Wood resident)

About this project

This project aimed to bring different people together on the Holme Wood estate in Bradford. A related report is also available as a free download from <http://www.jrf.org.uk/work/workarea/bradford-programme>

The documentary film, *Voices from Holme Wood*, can be viewed at www.jrf.org.uk/communities-bradford

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Other formats available.
Tel: 01904 615905
email: info@jrf.org.uk