Communities and Local Government

NCF National Community Forum

Guidance on meaningful interaction

How encouraging positive relationships between people can help build community cohesion

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December 2008
Department for Communities and Local Government

Communities and Local Government
Eland House
Bressenden Place
London
SW1E 5DU
Telephone: 020 7944 4400
Website: www.communities.gov.uk

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Communities and Local Government Publications
PO Box 236
Wetherby
West Yorkshire
LS23 7NB
Tel: 0300 123 1124
Fax: 0300 123 1125
Email: communities@capita.co.uk
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Foreword

What makes a real community? It's a place where people know, understand and respect their neighbours. Where people pull together in a crisis and come together to celebrate achievement. These communities can be found right across the country. In 21st century Britain, people form strong and lasting friendships with people of all different backgrounds, faiths and ages. We are a stronger country as a result.

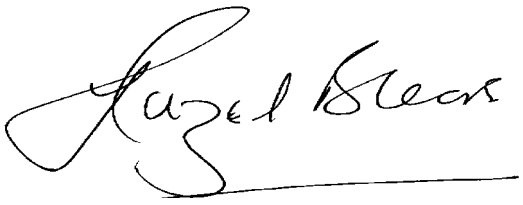
The human need to connect with others is as important to our wellbeing as it ever was. Yet we all lead busy lives, concentrated around our immediate families and friends. We don't always have time to get to know the people next door – let alone people living further afield. And where people are living individual, isolated lives, problems can arise. In the worst cases, people can become suspicious and hostile, especially towards individuals or groups they see as "different" or "not belonging".

Encouraging interaction is one of the simplest, most straightforward ways in which we can we can overcome these barriers. When people have the chance to get to know each other, they focus on what they have in common, rather than their differences. This helps to break down prejudice and stereotypes, fostering instead mutual respect and understanding.

People naturally already meet at the school gate, at the bus stop, in the park. If we make the most of these fleeting encounters, they can become lasting connections. Welcoming and inclusive public spaces are one way of encouraging this. Local areas can go further and promote interaction as part of activities. They can offer opportunities for people to come together – festivals, sports days, open days.

This guidance has been informed by work with the National Community Forum (NCF) who undertook a literature review and a workshop. I would like to thank them, their researcher and the participants of the workshop. In addition Communities and Local Government ran a workshop with national bodies with an interest. I would like to thank them too.

This guidance summarises what we already know about the benefits of interaction and how it can be achieved. I hope that it will act as a useful starting point for all those looking to build or strengthen bridges within their communities.



Rt Hon Hazel Blears
Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government

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Executive Summary

- Meaningful interaction between people from different backgrounds has been shown to break down stereotypes and reduce prejudice
- In addition, meaningful interaction is good for individuals, so encouraging interaction more generally will have a positive impact on cohesion
- For interaction to be effective in improving community relationships it needs to be positive
- For interaction to be meaningful it needs to go beyond a superficial level and be sustained
- Interaction can take a number of forms – all of which are positive for building community cohesion
- We cannot force people to interact or determine the way in which they interact. This work is about recognising the importance of interaction whatever form it takes and facilitating, encouraging it and promoting it
- We recommend that local areas aim to encourage more interaction between people from different backgrounds – and acknowledge, but do not solely focus, on the way we are measuring success nationally
- Encouraging interaction is about making it easier for people to do all the things they would do naturally, but feel unable to – whether that's about the design of public space, supporting volunteering and clubs, or supporting people who bring others together
- Interaction is an integral part of other activities – so if you wish to take specific actions to bring people together from different backgrounds, then it is most effective to make this a natural outcome of another activity
- Deciding to support interaction means that your organisation may need to make a commitment to it, as success depends on sustaining this work not one off events
- You may wish to promote its benefits, to promote a "culture of civility" and help people feel they have a voice
- Where there are conflict and disputes, you can use interaction to break this down, but that needs careful handling.

Section 1

Background

Our approach to building cohesion

The Cohesion Delivery Framework overview document sets out eight key principles on cohesion:

- Cohesion is relevant to all parts of the country
- Building cohesion has wider benefits to individuals, groups and communities
- Solutions are local and one size does not fit all
- Cohesion is about all parts of the community, not just race and faith issues
- Improving cohesion is about multiple actions tackling a range of causal factors
- Improving cohesion is about both targeted actions and taking account of cohesion in the delivery of other services
- Good practice in one place may not be transferable to another – but it may inspire an action that will work in another place
- Delivery is about common sense solutions that will help people get along better, that is what will make the vision a reality.

It then suggests a number of ways in which local work to build cohesion can reflect these principles:

- Undertaking an exercise to identify the key issues for cohesion
- Deciding on a set of actions depending on the local issues faced. And some pitfalls to avoid
- Making use of current guidance and good practice
- Planning for delivery through local partnership working.

Who this guidance is for and how it should be used

This guidance is aimed at local cohesion practitioners and policy planners. Although there is no local target to promote interaction, we believe that it is work that every area that wishes to build community cohesion will want to undertake.

This guidance includes some good practice. There is additional good practice available from the single cohesion portal run by the Institute for Community Cohesion and we will be working with them to ensure that further examples of good practice on encouraging interaction are available.
www.cohesioninstitute.org.uk/search/Pages/GoodPractice.aspx

Finally this guidance is not a blueprint for action. We are not suggesting that local areas undertake all the actions that it suggests or that we have covered all the actions that could be taken. Instead local areas should decide what actions they plan to take on the basis of their local mapping.

This guidance is our first attempt to set out what we know about meaningful interaction, and is based on research findings and the views of expert practitioners. We plan to revise it on the basis of local experience and so would be grateful to receive comments on it, whether they are suggestions for improvement or information about projects which have succeeded or failed.

We have set up an email address for such comments:
cohesion.guidance@communities.gov.gsi.uk

Section 2

What is meaningful interaction?

Firstly, for interaction to be effective in improving community relationships it needs to be positive. Negative interactions which involve arguments or unpleasant experiences will not build community cohesion (unless by going though them an issue is resolved).

Secondly, for interaction to be meaningful it needs to go beyond a superficial level and be sustained. The Commission on Integration and Cohesion report said meaningful interaction was when: "conversations go beyond surface friendliness; in which people exchange personal information or talk about each other's differences and identities; people share a common goal or share an interest; and they are sustained long-term".

Thirdly, interaction can take a number of forms – all of which are positive for building community cohesion. The CRE in its publication *Promoting interaction between people from different ethnic backgrounds* (CRE 2007) suggested that there are four types of interaction.

"Grounding interactions are about consolidating one's identity and values, take place with people with whom one shares a history, and help to build individual self-confidence and pride."

Banal interactions "are about consolidating one's external environment, and take place with people with whom one shares a community. [They] are typically fairly superficial – saying hello in the street or exchanging chit-chat. They help develop a sense of belonging and contribute to good community relations"

"Opportunity interactions are about broadening one's external environment, and take place with people with whom one shares potential benefits. Networks, self-help groups, campaigns and committees can bring people from different backgrounds together and open up new opportunities."

"Growth interactions are about broadening one's identity and values, and take place with people with whom one shares curiosity. It is through growth interactions that people change the way they see themselves and others, and find new things in common."

The report also suggested that these can take place in a cycle – so that each supports the other and people can move back and forth between the different types. Banal interactions can develop into regular acquaintance, which may also in turn develop into

friendship. That brings us to a **fourth key point, we cannot force people to interact or determine the way in which they interact. This work is about recognising the importance of positive interaction whatever form it takes and facilitating, encouraging it and promoting it.**

Section 3

What benefits does interaction bring?

Meaningful interaction between people from different backgrounds has been shown to break down stereotypes and reduce prejudice. Professor Miles Hewstone presented on this to the Commission on Integration and Cohesion and summarised the evidence from social psychology research as follows:

- Positive contact with a member of another group (often a negatively stereotyped group) can improve negative attitudes
  - Not just of the individual
  - But of the group as a whole.
- Inter-group contact breaks down prejudice by changing how we *feel* about the other group, and its members (mitigating against perceived threat, inter-group anxiety and negative out-group emotions)
- Promotes positive feelings (through encouraging empathy and perspective taking, promoting mutual sharing of personal information and positive inter-group emotions)
- Seeing people from your own group and people from different groups interacting positively can also have this effect.

This is supported by evidence from the Citizenship Survey:

- The Citizenship Survey (2005) shows that people with friends from different ethnic backgrounds are less likely to think that racial prejudice has increased, suggesting that those with more direct experience have more positive views
- Laurence and Heath's (2008) modelling of the Citizenship Survey found that having friends from different ethnic backgrounds was a positive predictor of community cohesion.

In addition, meaningful interaction is good for individuals, so encouraging interaction more generally will have a positive impact on cohesion. Its benefits include:

- helping people to develop and grow
- giving people a sense of purpose
- helping with integration

- improving overall life outcomes
- helping people change their lives, as people talking about their plans helps makes them real, especially when the other person can make a useful suggestion or give a useful contact
- helping younger people to develop their social skills, understanding of other people and citizenship
- helping older people by reducing fear that exists between generations; helping keep them active and involved, with the health and welfare benefits that will bring; and replenishing their diminishing network of friends.

These benefits to individuals will have a wider range of benefits to society in general. They allow: more integrated resilient and sustainable communities where issues can be resolved and diversity celebrated; communities that are more interesting and vibrant; and large bodies of people to cooperate and achieve things together. Meaningful interaction forms a foundation for Cohesion not just within communities, but also between communities across towns, cities and rural areas. There is more evidence on this in **Annex A**, but the following example gives an idea of the difference positive interaction can make.

CASE STUDY: Groundwork

On 11 July 2001, the Guardian reported on pilot surveys conducted at 17 Groundwork projects, turning derelict sites into community spaces. Local people were quizzed about the impact on their quality of life as a result of helping to build, then use, such amenities as skateboard parks, nature trails and community gardens. About 2,000 people were questioned before and after completion of schemes. They were asked about the social – as opposed to environmental – benefits.

The results show that those who helped organise or run projects made five new friends on average through their involvement; while eight in 10 had, in the previous six months, held a conversation with a new person of a different background from their own. And by the time a scheme was completed, 35 per cent of locals said they knew whom to contact in their neighbourhood to effect change, compared to 12 per cent when the work had begun. Eighty-six per cent said they felt safer going out and about in their area in daytime, compared to 55 per cent before the project had been carried out.

Section 4

Measurement

Increasing meaningful interaction is one of the national targets linked to cohesion. It is not a local target and is not being measured at a local level, but it is one of the key ways in which local areas can build cohesion.

The national Citizenship Survey will ask people about monthly interaction between people from different religious and ethnic backgrounds in a specific set of places. Those places are:

- at your work, school or college
- at your child's creche, nursery or school
- at a pub, club, café or restaurant
- at a group, club or organisation you belong to eg a sports club or
- social club
- at the shops
- at a place of worship and
- as part of their volunteering activities.

This currently stands at 82 per cent (April-June 2008).

This measure will give an indication of whether positive interaction is happening between some groups and in some places. As cohesion is about breaking down barriers between people from all different backgrounds, not just race and faith, our measure is an indicator, so should not be used as a basis for policy-making. For example, in some areas age or social class might be the key divides between people.

We recommend that local areas aim to encourage more interaction between people from different backgrounds – and acknowledge, but do not solely focus, on the way we are measuring success nationally.

Section 5

How can we deliver more meaningful interaction?

There will already be a lot of meaningful interaction going on in your area. People chatting to their neighbours, at school gates or at work, at places of worship, people pursuing their hobbies and interests in clubs, people working with others, often on a voluntary basis, to improve their local area or the lot of others.

It may seem strange that government should be suggesting that local areas get involved in what comes naturally to people and where the outcomes seem quite fluffy or woolly. However, we know how suspicion, fear and distrust can stop people from mixing with those who are different too them, lead to them only mix with people who are like them and reinforce suspicion, fear and distrust. With this background, when a difficult situation arises, their responses may be more extreme and, without bridges between different groups, harder to calm down.

Meaningful interaction may sound simple or wishy-washy, but we believe it is a difficult issue on which to design effective initiatives, but one that can make a real difference to people's everyday lives.

So our first message on delivery is that **encouraging interaction is about making it easier for people to do all the things they would do naturally, but feel unable to – whether that's about the design of public space, supporting volunteering and clubs, or supporting people who bring others together.** You don't have to spend more money – interaction can be designed into what you or others are doing already; and where it is already taking place – this needs to be recognised, valued and improved if possible.

Our second key message on delivery is that if you do wish to spend money to encourage interaction, **interaction is an integral part of other activities – so if you wish to take specific actions to bring people together from different backgrounds, then it is most effective to make this a natural outcome of another activity.** Linked to this you might wish to take specific action to publicise the benefits of interaction. It's common sense that interaction is good for you, but people can need reminding of this – that for adults, talking to strangers can be a good thing. And the more people have meaningful interactions with people from different backgrounds, the more it becomes socially acceptable/possible, to have friendships and joint endeavours with others.

Our third key message on delivery is that to support interaction your organisation may need to make a commitment to it, as success depends on sustaining this work not one off events; and you may wish to promote its benefits, to promote a "culture of civility" and help people feel they have a voice.

Finally, where there are conflict and disputes, you can use interaction to break this down, but that needs careful handling.

The following sections discuss work linked to the above four messages. As we said above – we are not suggesting that areas undertake all the following actions – the actions you take and how you focus this work will depend on the issues that you believe your area faces.

This guidance does not include guidance on interaction as part of the schools duty to promote cohesion, on which more information is available from **www.teachernet.gov.uk/wholeschool/communitycohesion/**

Since September 2007 maintained schools have had a duty to promote community cohesion, which Ofsted has inspected since September 2008. Local authorities have an important role of supporting schools to promote community cohesion and DCSF are encouraging them to include schools and youth services as part of their community cohesion strategy.

Local authorities should work to join up their education and cohesion strategies, along with supporting schools in meeting the duty in a number of ways, including: by assisting them to obtain a clearer picture of their local community; by helping schools to develop links with the community; and by facilitating links between schools within the authority.

DCSF is also working to encourage more school linking on which there is more information at: **www.schoolslinkingnetwork.org.uk**

It also does not include our support for inter faith activities and faith based social action, on which there is a separate framework available from our website **www.communities.gov.uk/communities/racecohesionfaith/faith/faithpublications/**

Further information on this is available from:
www.interfaith.org.uk
www.fbrn.org.uk
www.cdf.org.uk

It does have a brief discussion on using interaction as part of conflict resolution – but there is also more detailed guidance on this on our website **www.communities.gov.uk/publications/communities/communityconflict**

Section 6

Places and spaces that facilitate interaction

You may wish to look at whether local places and spaces encourage interaction; whether there are such places; whether there are barriers to interaction that can be addressed when an opportunity arises or small tweaks you can make (again when an opportunity arises) to facilitate more interaction. You could also identify those places and spaces which discourage interaction and try to transform them. Regeneration or new building projects often provide an opportunity to encourage more interaction through good design.

The importance of places and spaces is emphasized by the DTZ consulting research for the Commission on Integration and Cohesion which found that community facilities or the lack of them was the fifth strongest driver of cohesion. The NCF report noted the "value of community hubs – neighbourhood offices, community centres, radio stations, local parks – in giving the neighbourhood an identity that people can relate to and opportunities for people to come together".

The Demos publication *Equally spaced? Public space and interaction between diverse communities* by Hannah Lownsborough and Joost Beunderman provides a useful summary of the basic qualities of good quality public space:

- Multi-use
- Accessible and free (or low cost)
- Clear lay-out
- Local in character
- Adaptable
- Not restricted by gender, race, culture etc
- Safe and welcoming – this should be through intelligent design rather than CCTV or fences etc – graffiti, vandalism and signs of crime need to be tackled straight away.

You may wish to review whether public places and spaces in your area fit these criteria. It is notable that the space being neutral is not included in the above list. We believe this is because there is a benefit to meaningful interaction of including a recognition of difference and places with affiliations such as places of worship can provide a chance to learn about other people's lives or act as a starting point for conversation. So it is likely that both neutral

and affiliated places have a role to play in different circumstances. So spaces can be 'safe' or'charged'. You might also wish to consider another good quality of a public space as being that it is well-integrated into the surrounding area.

Demos also thought that all too often regeneration policy makers focus on high spec high design spaces – which may be intimidating; or public space is taken over by the private sector (eg coffee shops in hospitals); or public space is somewhere people rush through (eg train stations). They suggested that as most people spend most of their time in ordinary banal places, one option was to encourage and facilitate bottom up spaces:

- Exchange spaces – markets, car boot sales, coffee shops, book shops
- Productive spaces – allotments, communal gardens
- Spaces of service provision – school gate, bus stop – look for places people congregate while they wait for services and ensure small low cost design changes promote more interaction (wider pavements, symbolic shelters, seating etc)
- Activity spaces – play streets, street parties, waste land that's been taken over [also parks and playgrounds]
- Participative spaces – eg environmental improvement schemes or other shared activities where communities have ownership
- Celebratory spaces – these cannot change attitudes, but it's good to mark successes and symbolic changes
- In-between spaces – where there is high territoriality, new facilities should be on the borders between areas, not in the centre of a territory, that way different people will mix
- Virtual spaces – the internet can replicate existing barriers, so it needs to be used positively – perhaps by making use of social networking sites.

You may wish to review whether such public places and spaces exist in your area, where they are located and whether you are supporting them. You can then consider who uses them and how you could encourage other groups to use them as well.

Tower Hamlets Ideas Store

"the new breed of libraries, the Idea Stores, being developed by the London Borough of Tower Hamlets for one of the most diverse local communities in the world. Designed to look like no other libraries by architect David Adjaye, Idea Stores will eventually replace every library in the borough. The objectives of the Council are: …to bring the community together and to empower individuals to help themselves, whether it is learning to read, pursuing hobbies, expanding their knowledge or seeking a job.

The physical presence of an Idea Store is very striking. Firstly it does not have a defined threshold between street and library so one is drawn inside without the feeling of crossing any kind of boundary. This helps to create the sense of neutrality of the space which encourages users to interact.

Recent research would suggest that the Idea Stores are managing to balance the maintenance of traditional library functions with newer responsibilities for social inclusion and interaction.

Good practice examples provided by Comedia to the Commission on Integration and Cohesion.
Further information: **www.ideastore.co.uk**

Alexandra Park, Oldham

"the run-down Alexandra Park in Oldham separated Pakistani Glodwick from white Fitton Hill. Since the 2001 [disturbances] it has been completely refurbished and has been described by the director of the National Parks Agency as "the finest park in the land". This has included the return to the park of the town's annual carnival as an event in which all townspeople are encouraged to take part.

Preston Park, Hull

Pearson Park in Hull had also become a battleground, this time between local White youth and recently-arrived Kurdish refugees. In its midst was a bowling green and pavilion, jealously-guarded by elderly men preserving their right to open it for just one session a week. The council appointed two new park rangers, including a Kurd, Dilzar Ali, who negotiated peace between the gangs and opened usage of the pavilion for a variety of intercultural leisure activities, Kurdish and English language lessons, a job club and a Hate Crime Report Centre. It now hosts large gatherings and barbeques were different ethnic groups can meet.

The Mosaic Project

Meanwhile the Mosaic Project [which came to an end in September 2008] sets out to promote Britain's National Parks to minorities as part of a shared cultural heritage, as well as offering opportunities for physical recreation and spiritual renewal. An example of interracial contact emerging from this is Bradford woman Hawarun Hussain who described her experience to The Guardian: Someone just phoned me up and said, 'do you want a free trip to the Dales?' I'd lived in Bradford all my life, but I'd never gone to the Dales because I'm used to an urban environment. Afterwards I took my sons to the Dales and they just went into a trance: all the way back they were saying: "It's amazing, it's just like Bangladesh." But this wasn't 10,000 miles away, it was 20 minutes from where we live. Through Mosaic, I met some of the Green party councillors in Bradford. Politics had never really entered my life before, but I was surprised how much I liked these people. Hawarun is also now a Green Party councillor in Bradford.

Good practice provided by Comedia to the Commission on Integration and Cohesion. Further information: **www.mosaicpartnership.org**

CASE STUDY: Spa Fields, Islington (London)

Spa Fields is a small park in Islington, London. Before redevelopment, 2005-2007, it was run-down and in poor condition. It was dominated by intimidating fencing and a large, concrete football pitch that felt unsafe and threatening. Use was overwhelmingly among young gangs of youths and occasional office workers eating lunch in the summer.

The space was opened up to allow greater access and visibility. A new entrance passage was opened up, encouraging greater movement through the space, either of workers at the nearby offices or young mothers with pushchairs.

A key feature is the visibility into the park. Private spaces are cordoned off from many angles, but remain accessible and with clear sightlines. Spaces are clearly demarcated with low features, such as rows of lavender, that keep stillness and privacy but remaining in clear sight of the rest of the park.

A path running through the eastern end of the park shows how consultation can improve design. Previously it ran through the centre of a small depression, near to bushes. After a workshop with local women, run by the Women's Design Service, it was raised and placed on one side. As well as better visibility it felt safer and encouraged more people to walk along it. It is fully inclusive – this route goes through the younger people's play area, encouraging its perception as a space for everybody.

Engagement with young people of the area, and empathy with how they might use the space, has meant the park remains well-used although with very little vandalism. During the construction process, 13 local young people were given work experience on the site. Three went on to get permanent jobs with the construction company, giving a sense of local ownership. In the construction process, young people's spaces were equipped before those for toddlers, to avoid bored teenagers using and vandalising the play spaces.

You may also wish to look at how community centres are used and run – are they places which are accessible to different groups? – are they identified with a particular group and so not used by others? – are activities there for specific groups only, or do they encourage encounters between people who might not meet otherwise?

Section 7

Facilitating the existing activities that encourage interaction

People come together to pursue hobbies and interests, as part of societies or clubs. You could consider whether there is more you can do to support them – as discussed above this may be about having low cost accessible facilities available.

There are also small community bodies (eg an after school club or the PTA) which are often the ones which are making a real difference to cohesion by encouraging interaction, although the difference they make will be hard for them to measure. These sorts of bodies might be getting seedcorn or no funding from the Local Authority; and when it comes time to review budgets it is important to recognise the additional benefits they have for cohesion.

Expert practitioners suggested a number of ways of supporting these bodies:

- Consider providing/pooling funds for positive, small scale community activities that address a wide range of different agency targets in an integrated and non-politicised way
- Provide services and spaces when people need them, not just when they are convenient to provide
- Be willing to take sensible risks with small groups
- Encourage wider connections between groups, without undermining those which already exist because 'they are not representative enough'.

You can also review whether well intentioned requirements prevent small groups or small activities from taking place – can you make paperwork less onerous, reduce the need for public liability insurance and so on. Are you taking a risk adverse approach or are you being realistic about the likelihood of possible risks actually happening? We all know how much the media love a "health and safety prevents community activity" story.

CASE STUDY: Plymouth Operation Talents – Neighbourhood Policing

This initial project gave £500 to each of 11 neighbourhood sergeants. They took the stake money into their neighbourhoods and developed initiatives with it. The only conditions were an expectation to turn the money into more value than £500 and to use it to address the crime and disorder priorities identified through the local Partners & Communities Together (PACT) consultation process.

Talents 1 led to a wide range of projects, mostly involved in youth activity to prevent disorder, the prevalent PACT priority at the time.

One of the projects, the Granby Island Fireworks Scheme, illustrates the impact the scheme had on communities. The local Council matched the £500 stake money, support was gained from a local community group and the money was used to create a safe and orderly bonfire and fireworks celebration for Guy Fawkes night.

In this area in previous years, there had been disorder linked to the use of fireworks and illegal bonfires. The unique factor was that the young people in the area led the project. They undertook Health & Safety and food hygiene training, worked with the Police and Fire Brigade and managed and marshalled the event. This remarkable event took place with the same young people who had previously been the subject of disorder allegations; they wore high visibility jackets, carried clipboards, arranged barriers, prepared and served the food for the evening. These young people walked away with fond memories but also with certificates in Health and Safety and food hygiene!

The event recently won the Chief Constable's Award under the Crime Beat Scheme, presented by the High Sheriff of Devon. This project was life changing for those involved and is now an annual fixture.

Section 8

Making a commitment to interaction

It may be important to get commitment from your own organisation to this work. Expert practitioners have told us how organisations can be wary about working on meaningful interaction unless there was hard evidence to support initiatives. This might reflect how the organisation saw itself, how it was set up and whether it was ready to embrace different and new ways of doing things.

You might do this through using the evidence in this guidance. Getting key people to experience meaningful interaction in communities first hand may be what persuades those with power on the LSP. Or you could have internal interaction events, such as organisations giving staff a time and space to have conversations with colleagues they didn't know – the sort of meaningful interaction that smokers have on cigarette breaks; or putting cards with topics for discussion in work canteens.

With commitment from the organisation, you can look at how you might encourage interaction between people from different backgrounds as part of the delivery of services. For example schools and colleges can provide adult education, hosting events and providing recreation facilities. This could be a key element of ESOL lessons or youth work.

Developing activities that facilitate interaction is a long term process and is not an immediate panacea (at the NCF workshop for example, we heard about developing the five-a-side football activities which has meant building them up slowly over nine years, rather than just trying to do a one-off event). **Deciding to support interaction means that your organisation may need to make a commitment to it, as success depends on sustaining this work not one off events.** This may also mean managing internal expectations about what can be achieved.

Section 9

Undertaking activities that facilitate interaction

If you wish to take specific actions to encourage more interaction, then these are most effective when interaction is the natural outcome of another activity.

In other words, don't set out to have an event that is about interaction (or more generally about cohesion) for its own sake, instead bring people together to interact over shared issues such as the environment, poverty or crime or shared interests such as sport, music or food. This could be about tackling shared issue or just getting together to have fun.

The NCF literature review found that: "shared factors can act as a springboard for building better relationships which allow differences to be explored and enable them to work together to improve their circumstances. The resulting relationships are thus more robust than ones built solely on what is shared in common. They also leave space for listening to the different experiences and perspectives of groups where these don't necessarily fit with those of the powerful or the majority."

Practical activities could include:

- Inter-generational work through tea dances, shared trips, 'back to school' days, exchange of skills
- Festivals where there is something for everyone
- School linking
- Encouraging more men to volunteer to work with young people
- Drama and role play, so young people can think in other people's shoes
- Welcome parties for new residents.
- Creating music together
- Creating a CD or DVD about reducing conflict between areas
- Making a programme for community TV or Radio.
- Setting up groups to discuss shared experiences (eg having parents), heritage or interests.
- Improving the area through, street cleaning projects, planting, peer research, street advocates

- Encouraging mentoring and befriending
- Having street parties and street dinners.

On the final one two interesting web-sites are

www.streetparty.org.uk/

www.streetsalive.net/

CASE STUDY: Bring A Dish (East Sussex)

The Bring a Dish event was an intercultural networking celebration uniting a range of education, advocacy and supportive services, organised by the Celebrating Cultural Diversity Network (CCDN) in Hastings/ St Leonard's-on-Sea. It promotes intercultural dialogue and builds a sense of belonging to the community. CCDN is a dynamic community-based organisation with a membership of over 2,500 individuals, family groups and organisations, from over 97 different ethnic groups living in East Sussex. The Bring a Dish event provides an opportunity for members of these communities to showcase their culture and increase their understanding of their neighbours' cultures, by bringing a sample of food to a community event.

Further information: **www.celebratingculturaldiversitynetwork.org**

An example quoted by the Commission on Integration and Cohesion

CASE STUDY: BERAKAH

Guitarist and Composer Mohammed Nazam founded the new World/Jazz/Classical ensemble BERAKAH in summer 2005. Bringing together musicians of Jewish, Christian and Muslim heritage, Berakah is the first UK band of its kind. Featuring virtuoso musicians, it brings audiences together through music.

The band was formed with the aim of encouraging non-violence, peaceful co-existence, dialogue between people of differing faiths, awareness of common roots of the three main monotheistic faiths and the celebration of diversity. Berakah seeks to draw audiences from a variety of backgrounds to sit together and enjoy music in a spirit of togetherness. Berakah also hold music workshops at schools where young people can learn to play music together, and have already worked with schools in Brent, Harrow and Southall.

Further information: **www.theberakahproject.org**

Expert practitioners suggested the following principles for such activities:

- Activities should be natural and organic not forced, so it's about providing opportunities
- Keep it simple, don't be too ambitious
- Make it practical and tactile, about doing something
- Make it fun and imaginative
- Include the possibility of honesty and give people the chance to be heard
- Use language that people identify with
- Find low-key ways to enable it to take place
- Ensure strong local links
- Be flexible on times and places to make it accessible to as many people as possible
- Take some calculated risks.

CASE STUDY: Youth Cafe – Dinnington

The Youth Café was launched in September 2007 and was initially set up with Neighbourhood Renewal Funding through Rother Valley South Area Assembly. The Café gives young people from the area the opportunity to meet with friends in a safe environment.

The Café is open every Monday evening and is run by a group of volunteers, some of whom are young people. It is open at the same time as a sequence dance club, which consists mainly of local elderly residents. The two activities running alongside each other has assisted building positive relationships between young and older people, with the two groups undertaking some activity together. The dance group regularly have refreshments in the cafe with young people and are currently working together to organise some joint parties. Youth nuisance has reduced significantly in the area, especially on a Monday nights.

CASE STUDY: Old Ford Christmas and Eid Parties

There are many Christmas and Eid parties in Tower Hamlets. However, one organised by the residents of Old Ford Housing Association recently had a subtle and unique difference. By common consent and in a demonstration of community solidarity, the parties were organised as a joint effort by Bengali, Somali and European people all working together with an agenda of mutual respect to make events to which everyone was invited and welcomed.

This took place because Old Ford decided to move on from their approach of previous years, where cultures or faiths celebrated their festivities in isolation. They felt that the problem with such an approach is that it hindered opportunities for cross-cultural understanding and respect.

So, despite claims from some sections of the different communities to celebrate their festivals in this way, Old Ford's approach was one which seeks to find the commonalities that bring people together rather than focusing on the differences that divide them. So, while it accepted that it should support the different festivals, it thought that they should be organised and celebrated collectively. With gentle persuasion, and with incentives as well as support, Old Ford brought the different faith and race groups to get together to both organise and celebrate together. Over 150 people from different faiths and backgrounds enjoyed the Eid party and similar numbers participated in the Christmas party. The groups are excited and are already talking about doing a similar thing in the coming year due to the parties' huge success.

CASE STUDY: Old Ford Women's Exercise Classes

A well established voluntary sector organisation approached Old Ford about hiring a venue to stage exercise classes for Bangladeshi women. It had funding for them as a group with a varied set of health issues who were not using gyms or other facilities due to cultural or religious barriers.

Old Ford said that it was happy to provide a venue but that it had concerns about the effect on other communities of targeting this resource on a particular group. Women from other ethnic or religious groups presented similar health problems and they too were failing to access facilities due to their own cultural, ethnic and other barriers. For example, other women of European or Afro-Caribbean background had reservations about going to gyms due a lack of confidence or a reluctance to exercise in front of men. Similarly Somali women, many of whom share the same Islamic religion with their Bangladeshi counterparts, were avoiding gyms.

Old Ford agreed to provide free use of its community facilities as match funding on the basis that the sessions were open to all women in the area, yet maintaining the sensitivity faced by different cultural groups. The voluntary group managed to renegotiate funding for exercise classes and now provides sessions for all women, regardless of their background.

Targeting activities to build interaction

If you decide to undertake specific activities, you may wish to review existing evidence on the divides are in your area. This could help you focus on who you want to bring together. These might include:

- Physical segregation – whether this is people living "parallel lives"; not having the opportunity to meet someone different; or only meeting people in a small neighbourhood – how can you facilitate interactions between communities, and in district wide spaces and venues.
- Economic segregation – including class or economic divides (employed, in training, unemployed or retired) and lack of money preventing mixing, or wealth allowing people to self segregate
- Race/faith divides
- Different lifestyles, cultures
- Different attitudes, beliefs, worldviews
- Age divides

- Divides between existing and new residents – whether they are migrants or people not from the local area ('newcomers').

Expert practitioners commented on the term 'Hard to Reach', which they felt should by replaced by 'Need to reach', to reflect that this work should be about organisations making themselves more accessible – in terms of time, place and working methods. You could also consider how these divides could be working in combination.

Building partnerships

Depending on the activities you undertake and the types of individuals you decide to focus on, you may wish to do this in partnership with the private or voluntary sector or with faith communities. Again this is about getting commitment from these bodies – either using evidence, framing this work around an idea that strikes a chord with other bodies or for the private sector focussing on positive PR or any commercial benefits. Local authorities and LSPs can have a unique local role in being able to bring together different sectors and helping to put together funding from a number of sources.

A chance to fund positive activities

The NCF report noted that: "in some areas, when people have identified a shared problem for themselves, organising around this problem can be an effective way to build relationships in some areas. However, the focus on the negative that is inherent in this approach, when combined with the frequent need to accept another's negative label for one's own area/group in order to access funding, can cause problems and ultimately create new divisions."

"This can then limit subsequent engagement by those who don't want to accept these labels. For example, one practitioner wrote how many people who might otherwise benefit from … interaction activity would be put off from attending if it was funded from a source which was concerned with 'tackling racism', as they wouldn't want to be labelled 'a racist'. Another set of group notes recorded that: "Frustration was expressed that applying for funding for "deprived" communities constantly required having to highlight (even exaggerate?) the negatives and detrimental aspects of a community to tick boxes for successful applications. This can lead to a cycle of self-depreciation which filters in to human psyche of those living on the estate."

So activities that promote interaction, can be a chance to provide funding for positive activities in areas where there are problems, rather than funding that is tied to problems.

Leaving a legacy

Aim to leave a legacy from any event – so that you have built skills or have put in place the structures to ensure other such events happen in future.

Also an event is just the tip of the iceberg – much of what contributes to meaningful interaction is all the work and planning that goes on leading up to an event such as a street party and ideally this should involve as many people from the community as possible, perhaps each making a small contribution in some way.

Finally aim to have some form of evaluation. Evaluation will allow you to show success to maintain long term support and to help promote the benefits. This need not be too complex – it could just be a before and after comparison.

The Four Wards Intercultural Project in Leicester

The project set out to organise five events with the intention of creating 'intercultural bridging' between four parts of the city with very different ethnic profiles. These were:

- An exhibition challenging stereotypes of Pakistani women's place in the workforce held in Belgrave
- An evening of Asian music and dance at Aylestone Working Men's Club in Saffron
- An intercultural football tournament in Braunstone with teams from each ward
- A children's concert for schools from each ward
- A Sikh play presented by a Muslim group to an audience from the four wards.

While not all community organisations invited were willing to co-operate, participation exceeded expectations. The organisers were particularly pleased because participants were local residents and activists who would become opinion-formers in their own communities."

Further information: **www.emen.org.uk/fourwards.htm**

Good practice identified by the Commission on Integration and Cohesion

The Living Library (as reported by David Baker in the Times 22 April 2008)

As some unexpected spring sunshine brightened up the Finchley Road last Sunday lunchtime, 15 of us were waiting nervously in a room in Swiss Cottage's sleek new leisure centre to be borrowed as "books" in the UK's first ever Living Library.

The idea, which comes from Scandinavia, is simple: instead of books, readers can come to the library and borrow a person for a 30-minute chat. The human "books" on offer vary from event to event but always include a healthy cross-section of stereotypes. Last weekend, the small but richly diverse list included Police Officer, Vegan, Male Nanny and Lifelong Activist as well as Person with Mental Health Difficulties and Young Person Excluded from School. I was there as Gay Man.

In the catalogue we had been tagged with the kind of negative attributes that readers might expect to encounter. Male Nanny was down as "twee" and "child molester". Police Officer was filed under "corrupt". Mine included "very well dressed" and "has some sexually transmitted disease" ...

First out were Social Worker ("naive") and Immigrant ("wasting resources") and then Muslim ("beard") was borrowed for a quick chat, presumably about bombs and his attitude to women. ...

I was beginning to think that the denizens of this particularly liberal part of North London had had their fill of Gay Man, when I was introduced to my first reader, a young Romanian woman who was now living in London.

...We launched into a frank conversation about how much seeing two men kissing in Leicester Square had unexpectedly upset her. We traded impressions that we had of gay people and Eastern Europeans and politely acknowledged how ill-informed we both were. And then our time was up and she took me back downstairs to the desk. It was short and sweet, and I realised that I needed to know more Eastern Europeans. ...

Downstairs the Living Library's founder, Ronni Abergel, was elucidating the movement's aims. "We work on the principle that extreme violence and aggression happens between people who don't know each other. So the Living Library can bring together people who are otherwise unlikely to meet. We want to show that not every Muslim wants to blow you up, not every policeman is a bully." ...

The Living Library *(continued)*
(as reported by David Baker in the Times 22 April 2008)

By now it was nearly closing time and most of us were assuming that we had seen our last reader when a librarian came in with the news that two teenage boys had asked to borrow me. Earlier in the day, Alternative Medicine Therapist ("hippy") had said to me that she was learning a lot about her own prejudices from readers and her words came flooding back when I found two young black men waiting for me at the desk. As I sat down with them I braced myself for a stream of invective when one them gently asked, "Do you experience homophobia often?" It surprised me to find myself saying yes and we began one of the most fascinating conversations I have had for a long time. They said that they both had often had strongly anti-gay opinions. I said that if I saw them on the top deck of the night bus I'd probably go back downstairs. And once that had broken the ice, the conversation became an exhilarating opening of hearts. It was a shame we didn't have more time to talk – 30 minutes can pass very quickly – but I left with real hope. If all young people were like this, I felt, the world would soon be a better place.

More on the living library at:
www.living-library.org/

www.local-level.org.uk/uploads/LocalLivingLibraryReport.pdf

Potential pitfalls

You will also want to be beware of the pitfalls. Practitioners gave the NCF examples of when things can go wrong:

- "Football can bring people together, but if not planned/organised properly can also be very divisive and trigger conflict; ie passions can get high during [the] game and physical contact/altercations during [the] game can easily lead to confrontations and fists [which] could increase the 'them and us' divide. Done properly, [this needs: an] assessment whether the two groups are ready to compete, ie no recent scores to settle; preparation work with both groups; [seeing] football [as] part of a wider intervention; staff/volunteers/spectators who support teams [and] encourage positive attitudes, not just about thrashing your opponent on the pitch" (Youth Worker, written comment)
- "too many one off events with no funding for follow up / continuation. The event is ok but no long term difference [is made]." (Written comment from experienced convenor of multi-faith work, with widespread agreement).

And NCF also recorded the following comments from practitioners:

- Unless you plan well, you can reinforce existing group bonds, without creating bridges between groups
- Poorly-designed activities and poorly-skilled (or -committed) activists/workers/volunteers can build barriers
- Beware of your good intentions backfiring, for instance have you thought about whether your event has something for everyone
- Don't assume people from minorities know how, just because of their identity
- Big public events don't automatically promote meaningful interaction
- If you are undertaking work with the young and the old, don't forget those in the middle.

Section 10

Promoting interaction

It is common sense that interaction is good for you, but there are good reasons why we don't people do more of it:

- *Willingness.* This could be people's comfort in their existing relationships, their apathy and sheer unwillingness to interact. Or people feeling that they had been rendered powerless. There might be perceptions that community events were not for them. The NCF report noted practitioners had : "a strong concern that much activity designed to promote … interaction only ever worked with those who were already open to it, and hence never impacted on those who most needed it."
- *Lack of Time.* People have time to work and look after their family and meet existing friends – they don't have time to make new friendships or get involved with their communities. CRE research found that one of the most important barriers facing adults was the fact that family and friends already took up most of their social time.
- *Greater mobility.* Greater mobility in society can negate against building relationships. The NCF literature review quoted Haezewindt's work which found that "Tenure and length of residence were also significant factors in people having satisfactory relatives or friendship networks. The percentage of people having at least one close friend/relative living nearby and who saw or spoke to relatives or friends at least once a week rises sharply depending on length of residence in an area. For relatives, this figure rose from 34 per cent for those who had lived in their residence for less than five years to 65 per cent for those who had lived in their residence for 20 or more years. (For friends, the figures are from 53 per cent to72 per centrespectively.) In terms of giving reciprocal help to each other, "58 per cent of homeowners, 42 per cent of social renters and only 34 per ent of private renters were found to have high reciprocity". On the other hand mobility can provide an opportunity for … interactions if we integrate newcomers. Residential inertia can be a problem in solidifying group boundaries."

So one way to overcome these barriers is to promote activities that encourage interaction to get people involved and then use the positive messages coming out of their evaluation to reinforce this (the Groundwork example in Section 3 is a good example of this). You may wish to focus on telling people that there is something in it for them – that interaction has benefits to them as individuals and so it is worth getting involved in activities where they

will meet new people or to just talk to people they do not know in their local area. Or that people skills, such as interacting with different people, are valued by employers and will help you get a job and get on in your job.

THE NCF report noted that there is a: "need to address the question of what (if anything) practitioners should do if people do not wish to have meaningful interaction (or wish to interact in a hostile way) with those who are different to them. …. This places practitioners (who can't and wouldn't want to force people to interact) in the position where they have to go beyond just providing opportunities for interaction. They also have to actively promote the value of interaction."

If you decide to promote the benefits of meaningful interaction, the lessons of social marketing are that you should promote it in terms of the short term benefits to those getting involved: it is fun or cool, easy, a way to be popular, to be happy or satisfied and a limited opportunity. Campaigns that focus on how it is good in the long term, will make society a better place, will break down prejudice are less attractive as they sound boring, difficult and worthy.

For a concerted campaign you may wish to consider having a brand. Images can be very important and persuasive reflecting the persuasiveness of visual communication.

In this work the media are often criticised as helping to create barriers, but they can also act as PR for you – they are interested in tools to resolve conflict, as well as conflict itself. And the messages that come out of good interaction work can be very inspiring and tap into our human desire to feel connected to others.

The NCF reported that "Several respondents also noted the need to "celebrate achievements" and "celebrate diversities", including getting various forms of media involved in sending out positive stories about local people and the local area. Where possible, it was suggested that greater involvement of councillors and using community radio and TV could also assist in this process."

Promoting a culture of civility

For some areas there may be a need to improve levels of basic civility to encourage more banal interactions. Public culture matters, people want to feel at ease and welcomed by others. Meaningful interaction can need a culture of civility as well as the creation of opportunities.

Alessandra Buonfino with Louisa Thomson in their paper for the Commission on Integration and Cohesion Belonging in contemporary Britain referred to the individuals who affect us as being the "ones that we repeatedly observe and yet do not directly interact with – people who Stanley Milgram (1977) called Familiar Strangers: fellow

Londoners, people in the tube, people living in the same street or crossing the park each morning. Despite not knowing them, people share space with them and a relationship of mutual respect can go a long way towards creating a good sense of place and belonging." But where this does not exist, it is hard for people to interact. They quote two examples of local schemes – which are set out below.

Developing Neighbourliness

"the 'meet the neighbours' scheme organised by the Haringey's Area Assemblies in Tottenham N15, the most diverse postcode in the country with 106 ethnic groups. During the sessions community organisations are invited to come along and make a presentation about their origins, the motivating factors that brought them to Tottenham and the aspirations for their families. The organisations bring along a selection of snacks from their own culinary traditions.

Elsewhere in London, on the Camden North estate in Southwark, a local resident held separate meetings with the elderly white residents and the young predominantly Asian residents. She took the opinions of both groups across to each other before eventually bringing the two together in a joint meeting. The group worked to identify activities that could bring together different generations and cultures, and successfully started projects on the estate based around sport, gardening and day trips out of Southwark. The outcome of this intervention was that people felt the estate had improved – vandalism was at a minimum, the young people were more respectful of how their noise might affect the older residents (Southwark Alliance, 2005)."

Section 11

Supporting the people that facilitate interaction

There are an interlinked set of personal qualities that allow people to interact well: being open minded and curious; listening and taking on ideas; and sharing their own experiences and being ready to give. Also important is being confident, having a general understanding of what is going on in their community and not being afraid of change or difference.

Passionate, enthusiastic, and committed individuals by their very nature can encourage interaction and make connections between different individuals. You may wish to identify such people and give them support whether through training or by other means.

Focussing on the ready and willing

One approach is to start with those who are ready and willing, and then look to expand involvement more widely with the ready and willing acting as Champions and persuading those you who you decide you need to reach to join in.

This might mean you decide to focus on women or young people. As JRF research has found, "Women are very important in the formal and informal activities that help form relationships across the neighbourhoods, with children often a pivotal element in social networks. Action often mobilises around issues of childcare and schooling. Older women maintain older, established networks of mutual aid and assistance." *Joined-up places? Social cohesion and neighbourhood regeneration,* by Ray Forrest and Ade Kearns

Focussing on the social hubs

You might want to identify individuals who have strong networks or networking skills – people who are "social hubs" (*The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference* Malcolm Gladwell 2000). The NCF report recorded that "practitioners had done this by identifying and successfully enlisting support from key contact people in their areas, and had used this support to good effect alongside more open marketing of their activities. For example, one practitioner suggested: "Finding one person who can access a community and get people in the community together in a more informal context." Another, in discussing making contact with and involving young people, indicated that there was a: "need to get one of the group involved and sometimes others linked to that group will join in … Use people who have relationships with young people to work with

them rather than take it all on yourself." You can also use existing organisational means such as youth services, schools, youth groups and sports clubs.

The benefit of using this approach alongside other approaches is that certain key people already "have [the] relationships in place" in order to work with people who might otherwise be reluctant to get involved; as one resident community worker put it: "It's about getting key individuals who have a good reputation with their peers and bringing them together and they bring people from their groups."

Supporting activists

The NCF report found that "there is a crucial role played by locally-rooted activists who endeavour to build bridges between diverse local groups. This role is particularly important where interaction isn't happening, or where interaction is problematic. However, it is also important in supporting other areas where activities are contributing to maintaining positive interactions. Some of this work is directly about challenging perceptions and stereotypes. Other work is focused more generally on building community through common activities and concerns, creating greater interaction between diverse individuals and groups in the process."

This work can be difficult, risky or even dangerous. It can also wear people down. You may wish to consider how you can support such people and offer them relief or recognition, so that they do not suffer burn out.

Supporting community groups

The NCF report suggests: "community events and groups which had used all possible means to make everyone in the community welcome should not be criticised if a particular part of the community is not 'represented' within their organising group. … many of the activists recounted experiences of emotive critiques which had been levelled at those who had been trying to get involved because they were 'not representative enough'. Practitioners had found that this was a disabling argument which disempowers those who are otherwise willing to get involved in starting activity and building initial bridges between groups. Rather than criticising such activists or emergent groups, an alternative approach which was more successful involved seeing these people as key potential protagonists for initiating work that starts with where people are coming from."

Where you are funding community groups, you might also wish to consider how you might encourage them to ensure the group is accessible to all or is joining up with other community groups, so that people can encounter others who they might not normally mix with. This might just be about providing advice and support to the group, or you may wish to ask the group to make a statement about how its work will contribute to local

community cohesion. Clearly, you will want to take a light touch approach to this, so you do not place unreasonable burdens on small organisations. But making services accessible for all and helping people to mix with others, are aims that many community groups and faith communities will have sympathy with anyway.

Supporting community leaders

Community leaders are often already committed to interaction. We recognise that some self appointed leaders come to every meeting and are easy to engage, but may not be truly representative. However, this is only true of some; many do good work and at the very least habitual community representatives are useful 'social hubs.'

The NCF report suggests making discerning connections with key gatekeepers or leaders within different groups of individuals who see the benefits of bringing people together. These people do not necessarily have to be established community leaders, but will be willing to engage across traditional boundaries within facilitated shared spaces.

The NCF report recorded that: "Practitioners saw this process of developing skills as essential in building community leaders who were able to bring individuals and groups together: "We need to begin to identify people in local communities as emergent leaders and train them. We need a can do attitude and get the people who are new to the community to bring their young people in. It's important the person themselves comes forward …. We provide an opportunity. It's about encouraging people." (Resident, cited in group notes)

Training and skills

The NCF report noted the practitioner view that: "Key skills considered necessary, if difficult, for those involved to learn included listening skills. …Other skills that were considered important included conflict management skills and an ability to constructively challenge stereotypes and prejudice." You might wish to organise training, mentoring or other support to give people the skills to facilitate meaningful interaction – whether this was for workers, activists, people in communities, or leaders.

Section 12

Helping to give people a voice

A barrier to interaction is people not knowing what to say, how to say it or even if they can say it:

- *Ability.* People can be reticent or find it hard to break out of traditional ways of behaviour (The anthropologist Kate Fox has called this the English social dis-ease), along with not having or feeling that one does not have the skills to interact, for example not being good at listening.
- *Language.* People worry that they will be unable to talk about difficult issues without saying the wrong thing or offending people. The NCF report quoted a practitioner saying that: "People are so tied up in what they can't do and say. … They actually feel bound up by not knowing [what they can say] so the community doesn't intend to be exclusive but they don't know how to ask what they are allowed to say." And: "feeling (often for well founded reasons) that they'll be condemned for expressing their opinion". And workers having "put up barriers to deeper integration through requiring people to interact in a pre-defined language before people have been able to express how they honestly feel in their own words." Moreover, participants indicated that this has created a culture where people think they are being inclusive because they are using politically correct language, and they can't see the other ways in which they are being exclusive."
- *A lack of real empowerment* .The NCF report recorded: "A range of widely-supported written comments from participants indicated that a lack of genuine consultation with local people contributed toward worsening … interaction." Furthermore, there was a concern that top-down processes were imposing "structures that hinder participation at a strategic level" and which inhibited honest dialogue amongst the participants, who can "get sucked into organisational politics and internal battles" ….activities which were seen as having little effect included "dialogues which try to impose pre-set actions and don't really listen to participants".

The NCF report set out how a practitioner had described an event "that had been organised to explore and share the religious identity of young people including those with no faith. Whilst the event overall went well, there were two particular related (yet seemingly opposite) challenges involved. The first was some of the young people deliberately 'having a go' at something that they saw to be wrong in another faith. This created a twin danger arising from the fact that young people (like other participants in

activity designed to stimulate … interaction) "may want to talk but they may not be well-informed", and also that people don't want to be challenged and so won't necessarily respect someone else's point of view. Despite these perceived difficulties, one of the pieces of feedback received after the event was that there was 'not enough conflict'!"

Also "Frequently, practitioners agreed that "there is no discussion about disagreements" (as one community centre manager described it), which meant that problems are not explored and resolved. Furthermore, if there is discussion of differences and disagreements, is the point of this discussion debate and/or sharing and learning from each other"

Work to encourage interaction can include support for people to feel they have a voice – to feel they can be curious, ask questions about difference and talk about controversial issues. Addressing these barriers reinforces a number of points:

- the need for interaction to be encouraged as part of other activities
- the importance of planning ahead and using facilitators for such activities who can use their skills to get people involved and help them set ground rules for talking about difficult or controversial subjects
- that conflict or the use of words some people find offensive is not necessarily a bad thing, if it is part of a process which helps address issues
- that activities are sustained or people get feedback from them.

Section 13

Supporting work on conflict resolution

As noted above, there is detailed guidance on conflict resolution available from our website **www.communities.gov.uk/publications/communities/communityconflict**. There are a number of hard-edged barriers to interaction, which require conflict resolution, which itself includes managed interaction as one of its tools.

- *Suspicion, myths, fear etc.* People's lack of understanding of other people and the related issue of stereotyping. Important personal feelings like fear, anxiety, and insecurity are reasons why people found meaningful interaction difficult. Many of these feelings are stronger for those who are less able owing to age or illness
- *Jealousies.* Funding can contribute towards divisions by causing resentment and jealousies over the actual or perceived provision of separate and/or targetted services, or by challenge funds which put one community or group up against another
- *Negative Influences.* Including the influence of negative media and local or national myths. In some areas the influence of far right political parties is a problem
- *Conflict and territoriality.* Gangs, territoriality and unresolved conflicts. Parochialism in small communities.

As the NCF report suggests: "ultimately, activities designed to improve interaction can only ever aim to support informal collaboration and neighbourhood encounters, not replace them. It is not possible to force people to change their mindsets to become less prejudiced through organised activities, or make them want to interact, especially if they see this as involving them changing their own identity. For example, one experienced facilitator indicated to the NCF that: "The most that you can hope for is that they become tolerant of other people's mindsets. … We can only plant the seed." And "In this context, it is particularly helpful to think about these activities as a form of informal education that is concerned with creating spaces for learning. Practitioners indicated that much of their work, whether through bringing people together or by acting as a broker between groups, involved informally educating people to help different people to understand each other better."

And "as one experienced facilitator noted, people's own unique experience and history makes their mindset. As a result, challenging them to try to change them can be perceived as a very personal attack on someone's own identity. By contrast, a more open-ended process of dialogue can open up alternative possibilities. The strength of many of the

small-scale initiatives … was seen as arising from the opportunities they provided for participants learning from each other. One practitioner involved in inter-faith work helpfully referred to this as a process of creating opportunities for "disguised learning", if practitioners are able to make the most of the opportunities that these initiatives present. Within this process of "disguised learning", individuals who hold prejudiced or extremist views are able to encounter new people and find their views challenged in a low key way that does not threaten their identity further."

Some practitioners' experience was that you had to "Sort the issues. Bust the Myths. THEN and only then…..bring people together". In other words, interaction will not make a difference, unless the underlying conflicts are first addressed – whether they are real or perceived.

Other models of creating meaningful interaction use encounters between people who still have issues and myths to generate the learning, bringing together people who may still have substantial differences, issues and conflicts and use the process to bust the myths and sort the issues, rather than requiring these to be sorted out as a prerequisite.

Clearly, this needs careful and expert handling. The *What Works in community cohesion* (Communities and Local Government 2007) research found that for youth work, the steps were: target specific individuals who have most negative attitudes; extend project reach – to parents, friends; where tension exists, build interaction gradually, and in neutral settings.

Communities R Us, Bolton

Communities R Us investigates and promotes contact and communication at a neighbourhood level between different communities with a particular focus on areas where there has been recent in-migration.

The immediate aims of the project are to help residents get to know each other through shared activities, to increase neighbourliness and benefit all residents. The underlying aim is for different groups of residents to come together through their common concerns and aspirations; for long-term residents to recognise the positive commitment and contribution refugees can make to the neighbourhood; and to give long-term residents the confidence to communicate with, and live alongside, refugees and new settlers without fear of their difference.

In Bolton, the project has worked in the Derby Road/Deane Road neighbourhood where the long-term white residents and established Asian population have experienced changes with the recent arrival of a number of refugees – including Somalis, Iraqi Kurdish, Francophone Africans and other Africans.

Interviews to collect opinions on the area were conducted by local 'ambassadors' who came from the same communities as interviewees. More than 50 interviews were completed, covering all three target 'groups' (long-term white residents, medium-term Asian residents, and recent migrants). This helped to establish trust and break down communication barriers (including, of course, their ability to do the interviews in a shared language). These interviews provided material for a locally-produced drama, with actors recruited from the neighbourhood, to 'play back' and concerns about the neighbourhood in a way which would provoke discussion and might help to resolve conflicts The drama scenes relied on mime so that people speaking different languages could understand.

Good practice identified by the Commission on Integration and Cohesion.
Further information: **www.hact.org.uk/downloads.asp?PageId=155**

Round Ere, OO Cares?!' A Project for Bletchley

The project was commissioned by the Anti-Racial Harassment Group, Community Safety Partnership and Bletchley Taskforce as a result of increasing intensity of racially violent incidents that had been occurring between young men from the Lakes Estate and the Bangladeshi Community of Bletchley Town Centre.

The project sought to identify the reasons behind the increasing number of racial attacks amongst young people and to find practical ways of preventing racist violence in the future. Street Dreams is a local organisation which aims to give young people a vehicle to voice their opinion; they carried out the project and encouraged young people to talk about issues amongst themselves and with representatives from local authorities, local government and local agencies. Initially, extensive consultation took place on the Lakes Estate, in the local school and in Bletchley, to plan the project and ensure that access to the 'hard to reach' populations was achieved. Through this consultation, the project informed local people of what it was trying to achieve, and obtain guidance and ideas about how it could do this.

It was apparent that there was a lack of understanding, ignorance and fear between communities, and these attitudes contributed to territorial problems. The consultation also discovered that services targeting young people had a territorialised system of delivery, which created barriers for bringing people of different cultural backgrounds together – for example, youth club provision in the town centre is only utilised by the Bangladeshi community and there is no such facility in the Lakes Estate.

From the consultation responses, a 'Fun Day' was organised by a group of young female volunteers, supported by Street Dreams. It took place at Leon School and Sports College (the local secondary school where communities come into contact with each for the first time) and 150 people attended, with good representation of both the Lakes Estate and the Bangladeshi Community from Bletchley Town Centre. Following the event, it was discovered that some young people had attended the event prepared for conflict (equipped with weapons); however, no disturbances or incidents occurred during or after the event.

Good practice identified by the Commission on Integration and Cohesion.
Further information: **www.street-dreams.org.uk**

Annex A

Further Evidence

Evidence of the wider benefits on interaction

An excellent summary of the evidence on this is found in *Neighbouring in contemporary Britain* by Alessandra Buonfino and Paul Hilder (JRF), which is worth quoting from extensively:

"According to Richard Layard (2003), for most people it is not money but valued personal relationships with family, colleagues, friends and neighbours that provides the best guarantee of happiness….. Mental health, satisfying and secure work, a secure and loving private life, freedom, moral values and a secure community were found to be the main factors affecting happiness.

According to a MORI study in the UK, important predictors of happiness are being retired, talking to neighbours and doing sport (2005). The more people speak to neighbours, the happier they tend to be (even after controlling for correlated factors such as being retired). ….

Much research has shown that social connections inhibit depression. People who have close friends and confidants, friendly neighbours, and supportive co-workers are less likely to experience sadness, loneliness, low esteem and problems with eating and sleeping. Various participants to Putnam's research spoke of how contact with neighbours helps them "feel relaxed", "comfortable, at ease, satisfied".

Mounting evidence suggests that people whose lives are rich in social capital (of which neighbourliness is a vital part) cope better with traumas and fight illness more effectively – while neighbours may be far less important than friends and family, they can still play a key role in people's wellbeing. Sociologist James House (2001) concluded that the positive contributions to health made by social integration and social support rival in strength the detrimental contributions of well-established biomedical risk factors like smoking, obesity, elevated blood pressure, and physical inactivity. Bruhn and Wolf (1979) have also studied health and heart disease in Roseto, Pennsylvania where neighbourly behaviour was prevalent through societies, clubs, churches and even congregating on front porches, and it helped to explain the Rosetans' good health and lack of heart disease. They found that people who are socially disconnected were between two and five times more likely to die from all causes, compared with matched individuals who have close ties with family, friends and the community.

There is also evidence that child development is powerfully shaped by social capital. Trust, networks, and norms of reciprocity within a child's family, school, peer-group and larger community have wide-ranging effects on the child's opportunities and choices, and hence on his or her behaviour and development. Community psychologists have long noted that child abuse rates are higher where neighbourhood cohesion is lower (for example, Vinson and Baldry, 1999). Where civic engagement in community affairs is generally high, teachers report higher levels of parental support and lower levels of student misbehaviour. Students may perform better when they spend less time watching television: where community traditions of social involvement remain high, children are naturally drawn into more productive uses of leisure than those where social connectedness and civic engagement is limited (Putnam, 2000). While family is certainly the primary determining factor for child development, community support also plays an important role.

Social networks, of which neighbouring ties are an important part, can affect the economic prosperity of individuals. People who grow up in well-to-do families with valuable social ties are more likely to succeed in the economic marketplace, not merely because they tend to be richer and better educated, but also because they can use their connections to their advantage. Economists have developed an impressive body of research suggesting that weak ties influence who gets a job, a bonus, a promotion, and other employment benefits. Social networks provide people with advice, job leads, strategic information, and letters of recommendation (Granovetter, 1970s). …

Neighbourliness can cut crime and support the collective interest studies show that neighbourliness and ties at the local level can help the collective interest. Lower levels of crime can result from neighbourliness, to the benefit of the whole community. In The Death and Life of Great American Cities (Jacobs, 1961), it is clear that social capital is what most differentiated safe and well organized cities from unsafe ones. Where cities are configured to maximize informal contact among neighbours, the streets are safer, children are better taken care of, and people are happier with their surroundings. This develops a sense of continuity and responsibility in local residents, creating a "web of public respect and trust, and a resource in time of personal and neighbourhood need". In areas where people are connected through tight bonds of friendship and looser yet more diverse acquaintanceship ties, and where people are active in local committees and clubs, there are fewer muggings, assaults, burglaries and car thefts.

Poverty and residential mobility are also factors which influence crime rates, but one study by Sampson et al. (1989) has suggested that while poorer, less stable areas do have substantially higher rates of street robbery, this is not simply because of poverty and instability: rather, these places have higher crime rates because adults do not participate in community organisations and informal social control. Similarly, Ross and Jang (2000) in a large telephone survey of 2,482 Illinois residents found that convivial neighbourly relations acted as a buffer to the wider environment of crime. Neighbourliness can create a sense of security, even in a dangerous neighbourhood. As a respondent in the Manchester's

Neighbourliness Review put it, neighbourliness gives you, "some sense of being part of something larger, through which you also have a sense of protection". (2004, CDF)

Annex B

Further information and reading

Equally spaced? Public space and interaction between diverse communities by Hannah Lownsborough and Joost Beunderman (Demos, 2007)
www.demos.co.uk/publications/equallyspaced

Social interactions in urban public places, by Caroline Holland, Andrew Clark, Jeanne Katz and Sheila Peace (JRF,2007)
www.jrf.org.uk/knowledge/findings/housing/2048.asp

Promoting interaction between people from different ethnic backgrounds (CRE 2007)
http://83.137.212.42/sitearchive/cre/research/promotinginteraction.html

NCF report – What Works in Enabling Cross-Community Interactions?
(NCF – forthcoming)

People Make Places Growing the public life of cities Melissa Mean, Charlie Tims, (Demos 2005)

Bringing Communities and People Together Phil Wood Comedia (2007)
www.integrationandcohesion.org.uk/Research_documents.aspx

Belonging in contemporary Britain Alessandra Buonfino with Louisa Thomson Young Foundation (2007)
www.integrationandcohesion.org.uk/Research_documents.aspx

Annex C

The NCF recommendations

This guidance aims to reflect the 11 recommendations in the NCF report – What Works in Enabling Cross-Community Interactions?

Recommendation 1: That practitioners in community and statutory organisations work to create spaces where people can meet in low-key ways, based on aspects of their identities and interests which they hold in common, but which leave them space to explore difference in other respects.

Recommendation 2: That practitioners in community and statutory organisations identify contact points which link groups and play a discerning proactive role in bringing these together, encouraging wider connections between groups without undermining existing connections because they are 'not representative enough'.

Recommendation 3: That Communities and Local Government and other research funding bodies consider funding additional research and resources which focus specifically on the skills and processes that practitioners and organisations can use to bring individuals and groups together successfully, to verify, develop and publicise these findings further.

Recommendation 4: That statutory agencies in particular provide services and spaces when and where people need them, not just when and where they are convenient to provide. This may mean taking sensible risks with small emerging groups, as well as training core staff and enabling them to use their time to actively promote interaction.

Recommendation 5: That funders and statutory agencies, as well as those running these activities, recognise the importance of having positive community activities and spaces used by multiple interacting groups which are not stigmatised by being organised around a problem or restricted to those holding a single aspect of shared identity. Consequently, these agencies and funders should consider whether they can also support activities which bridge across communities whilst promoting positive aspects of them.

Recommendation 6: Even where activities are oriented around addressing problematic community relations between particular groups, funders and those running these activities should work together to recognise the long-term nature of any process of change. This will often involve managing expectations of these activities to keep them realistic, so as to enable contact and interaction to be developed gradually over the longer term, as this can ultimately facilitate more meaningful interaction.

Recommendation 7: That existing community groups, infrastructure bodies, and statutory agencies should all work together to identify, encourage, value, support, and offer training to emerging leaders who are trying to bring people together to engage in positive interaction with each other.

Recommendation 8: To do this, these bodies should consider resourcing a supportive infrastructure that will offer support to existing and emerging activists and practitioners, including free mentoring, training and opportunities to share with others involved in similar activity, in order to reduce isolation and develop practice.

Recommendation 9: That those delivering services are more aware of the potential resentment which can be created from the provision of separate and/or targeted services for particular groups, and strive to encourage complementary delivery so that other groups do not feel that they lose out as a result.

Recommendation 10: That statutory organisations and other funders consider how to overcome the highlighted ways that current funding approaches can contribute to divisions and be detrimental to developing more positive interactions over the long term. In particular, these bodies should consider providing and/or pooling funds for positive, small scale community activities that address a wide range of different agency targets in an integrated way.

Recommendation 11: Communities and Local Government and other funders should consider undertaking combined quality research into the effectiveness of small-scale community activity in enabling positive meaningful interaction between different individuals and groups. This work could consider how best to measure the effectiveness of such work, rather than requiring each individual practitioner and group to prove the efficacy of their work. This is particularly necessary given the small-scale nature of such work and the need to develop appropriate research methodologies that can capture this effectiveness in a more integrated way.

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