



HARMONY PROJECT

Intercommunity Conflict Prevention and Resolution in Moss Side, Manchester

RESEARCH REPORT Executive Summary

April 2007

Executive Summary

Introduction

The Commission for Racial Equality (CRE) funded Manchester Council for Community Relations' (MCCR) Harmony Project with the aim of preventing, or helping to stop the escalation of inter-community conflict in Moss Side, and to apply any lessons learnt across the City of Manchester.

The project was undertaken in Moss Side and surrounding wards in Manchester. The area generally enjoys good community relations, but it is blighted by gun and gang related violence and there is also some tension between Somali and African-Caribbean young people.

There were three inter-related strands of work in the project.

Strand 1 Gathering the views of young people living in Moss Side and adjoining areas

Strand 2 Identifying good practices in preventing inter-community conflict

Strand 3 Testing the effectiveness of existing processes to prevent or resolve inter-ethnic conflict

The research was conducted in 2006, during a period in which there were numerous gang-related shootings in the area, including the murder of Jessie James, a 16 year-old schoolboy. Anxieties and tensions at this difficult time may have some bearing on the findings.

A total of 17 main recommendations are made.

Key Issues, Findings, Conclusions and Recommendations

The main findings and conclusions from interviews and workshops with 137 young people, mainly of African-Caribbean and Somali origin, and interviews and discussions with local youth and community workers are included in this section

Strand 1 Views of Young People in Moss Side and adjoining areas

Perceptions and image of the area

Young people are generally positive about Moss Side. They cite friends, families, proximity to facilities and good relations between communities, the absence of racism between communities and the quality of youth and community workers. Somali young people also mentioned the benefits of the local mosques and halal takeaways in nearby Rusholme. Moss Side continues to have an unjustifiable poor image, due to gun and gang related crime, as statistics show it to be relatively safe compared with many other areas in both Manchester and Greater Manchester.

Recommendation 1

Local communities should reinforce the message that Moss Side is a safe and friendly neighbourhood despite the gang problems, and that much work is being done to tackle gang and gun crime.

Recommendation 2

All key agencies should do more to promote a more positive image of the area, covering stories of investment, enterprise, community spirit, improving schools, extensive facilities and the proximity to the higher educational institutions and cultural amenities. Particular emphasis should be placed on cross-community initiatives and individual success stories.

However, they worry about safety and security and are especially concerned about gang-related violence. Young men in particular are careful about who they affiliate with and where they “hang out” for fear of abuse and violence from violent gangs that are based on territorial and ethnic groups.

Recommendation 3

Young people from all sections of the community should be given the opportunity to understand and participate in activities led by “adults” to make the place safer, especially in cross-community initiatives designed to defeat the so called local gang culture.

Tensions between young Somalis and African-Caribbeans

Although relations between young Somalis and African-Caribbeans are generally good, some African-Caribbeans have mixed feelings. They believe Somalis think they are superior and hold negative views about African-Caribbeans. Some Somalis, in turn, feel hostility from some African-Caribbeans and have been subjected to low-level intimidation and attacks from African-Caribbean young people.

Recommendation 4

Somali and Afro-Caribbean Community leaders and local youth workers should come together with young people to support and encourage initiatives that bring together young people from all the diverse ethnic and social groups in the area.

Recommendation 5

The issue of differences of experiences, cultural, ethnic, social and religious backgrounds should be explored in schools and in the community. There is a need to breakdown the stereotypes and prejudices between groups and, although this is a difficult and problematic subject, communities and institutions should work together to educate young people about their history and roots.

Lack of interaction between Somali and Afro-Caribbean youth

Although the area has many youth and recreational facilities, young Somalis and African-Caribbeans tend not to mix. Somalis prefer friendships with other Somalis. African-Caribbeans, whilst mixing with other groups, tend to avoid mixing with Somalis.

Local youth and community services are stretched and do not give enough priority to encouraging interaction between Somalis and Afro-Caribbeans. Many local youth projects are under-resourced and on short-term funding. They do not have the resources to provide the high quality services and support that young people need, although young people from all backgrounds have a high regard for the local youth workers.

Recommendation 6

All youth programmes should be reviewed to assess the extent to which they unintentionally foster “separateness and difference”. Opportunities should be created to encourage activities that bring together young people so that they can bond and form inter-community friendships and ties.

Recommendation 7

All new mainstream provision should be planned to ensure that young people from different communities and localities and youth groups are involved in purposeful activities that encourage interaction.

Recommendation 8

A small fund (perhaps £30k per year) should be established for discrete activities that bring young people from different communities in purposeful and enjoyable activities, so that they have the time and space to get to know each other in a safe and secure environment.

Problems at the Powerhouse

Most Somalis and some African-Caribbeans feel that a local African-Caribbean gang(s) dominate the flagship Millennium Powerhouse youth centre. Youth workers shared this view. Somalis choose not to go the Powerhouse for fear of intimidation by this gang(s). Some African-Caribbeans felt the same.

Recommendation 9

It would be useful for the Powerhouse management to consider reviewing the barriers to access, especially to young Somalis. Young people from all sections of the community should be involved in such a review.

Lack of provision for young women and girls

Young women and girls have fewer opportunities than young men and boys in youth and leisure activities. There are very limited facilities for female-only activities and this results in exclusion of Somali young women and girls, as they are often unable to participate in mixed settings.

Recommendation 10

Youth and leisure service providers should review their provision for young women and girls and take into account cultural and religious needs and preferences, including some women- and girls-only provision.

Education and Employment

Both Somalis and African-Caribbeans feel let down by schools and colleges. They feel that teachers have lower expectations of them compared to their white peers. They believe that many teachers have little understanding or empathy and that low number of teachers from similar backgrounds to themselves contributes to the problem. Educational attainment and employment prospects for both groups are poor. Far more need to be done to reduce the disparities between communities with respect to educational attainment and employment opportunities.

Recommendation 11

Schools should develop pupil satisfaction surveys, which are capable of analyses by ethnic groups.

Recommendation 12

There should be co-ordination between schools and employment and training services to enable Somali and African-Caribbean pupils to reach their full potential in education attainment and to gain skills through training opportunities thereby enabling them to compete for employment in the jobs market.

Recommendation 13

Co-ordinate the various initiatives to enable Somali and African-Caribbean young people to have a voice in the city by participation in different forums.

Perspectives on the Police

Somalis and African-Caribbean young people distrust the Police. They feel that they are subjected to unnecessary stops and that many police officers treat them with suspicion and disrespect. However, they also believe that the police are not doing enough to tackle criminality or gang ringleaders. Many would welcome more beat officers, but feel there should be more officers from local communities patrolling the area.

Recommendation 14

The Police should take a more sensitive approach to stop and search groups of young African-Caribbean and Somali men. Police officers and young people from Moss Side should learn more about each other through activities such as football and role play.

The Police should recruit more people from local areas and formally engage with young people and local youth and community workers.

Lack of Engagement and empowerment

Many young people feel that, apart from some youth workers, no one in authority listens to them. Although there are many consultations, they feel that no one is acting on their concerns or preferences. Many would like to be involved in decision making, especially in relation to youth matters.

Recommendation 15

The authorities and community leaders should develop a programme to train and develop young people so that they can participate in the myriad of groups and initiatives in Moss Side. Also, incentives should be given to youth workers to develop cross-community activities.

Strand 2	Good practices in preventing inter-community conflict
-----------------	--

Bolton Lads and Girls Club

This Club is a charity based in a relatively new £5m Millennium Fund complex, similar to Moss Side Powerhouse, in Bolton with state of the art facilities for young people aged 8-20. It attracts 3,000 visits by young people per week! It generates income of approximately £2m per year and is truly inclusive for all sections of the diverse communities in Bolton. It is strongly supported by the local business community and run by full time staff and a large number of volunteers.

Recommendation 16

The local statutory and non-statutory youth service providers should examine and evaluate the nature of these projects and see if any practice can be replicated in Moss Side.

Strand 3	Effectiveness of existing processes to prevent or resolve inter-ethnic conflict in Manchester
-----------------	--

An action planning roundtable was held on 28th March 2007. The primary aim of this roundtable was to provide the opportunity for key mainstream and community agencies to understand inter community conflict and develop thinking towards the better understanding of the mechanisms employed in resolving conflict and how they can be improved and formalized with the objective of developing a model 'protocol' on inter community conflict resolution between young people in Moss Side, with the potential for roll out to other areas. The current informal procedures for dealing with conflicts are informal and not understood by the wider communities.

Recommendation 17

A conflict prevention and resolution toolkit should be developed. It should be backed by a training and support package for key players, such as Councillors, council officers, including youth workers, local community and youth workers, the Police and community groups.

An information and communication strategy should be devised to manage conflicts and disseminate the toolkit.