

“Our Shared Future” - an approach to young people’s empowerment

Purpose

Bradford has a significant statutory youth service and even larger third sector youth services, delivering services to young people across the District. The emphasis of the Summit was to empower young people to speak up - to gain an informed picture of how Bradford is perceived by them as citizens and to identify key priorities upon which organisations working with young people should focus.

Peer Lead Approach Through Empowerment.

A key element to undertaking the Summit was ensuring that the focus of activities were influenced and directed by young people themselves. At the heart of this approach was a strong emphasis on “What Can I Do” as a citizen of Bradford.

Pre summit activity was undertaken by soliciting the views of approximately 500 young people between the ages of 13-19. This was carried out via mainstream education providers, excluded and disabled young people; looked after children and teenage mothers from across Bradford.

This approach ensured increased involvement from a wide and diverse group of young people and in particular those voices that may not be heard through any other route, as they are not linked to traditional routes of youth engagement. E.g. Youth Parliaments/ School Councils.

Through a questionnaire and facilitated workshops, young people were asked about:

- the three areas/topics they would like to see workshops cover at a summit, and why these were important to be raised on the day.
- what would they like to see developed for young people in Bradford?

In collating responses a clear consensus emerged on the following themes:

- **‘Building a Peaceful City’**- focusing on Gangs & Weapons
- **‘Similarities not Differences’** - focusing on Bullying
- **‘Living in Harmony’**- focusing on Racism/ Extremism
- **‘Don’t get a Habit’** - focusing on Drugs & Alcohol

In order to capitalise on learning from the event, twelve young people undertook a one-day media-training course with Digital Media Shakers at the National Media Museum in Bradford. The importance of this approach was significantly evident on the day of the summit;

participants seemed much more comfortable giving feedback to a journalist who engaged with them in a particular style and manner and one that is more conducive to their level communication.

Additionally, the experience and skills gained by the 12 digital journalists is very important to the overall approach of enabling young people. A number had never used the specialist equipment before, neither had they undertaken interviews. The training provided them with confidence and computer related techniques that many felt they could build on and potentially share with others. On the day of the summit they provided online coverage of the Summit and the participants’ views in “real time”, which was shared with a wider group of their peers who accessed their coverage via the You Tube website. In their words “Not bad for a days work”

“This is a new way of learning lots of different skills and I have enjoyed the experience.”

“At the start I didn’t think I would learn much... but I feel very different now, this has been a good experience and I’m glad I was given the opportunity to take part”

Other important elements to the Summit were the “ One Extreme to Another” play which focused on extremism and racial intolerance, along with an evening dinner dance featuring a number of local sports and media personalities.

Our Shared Future - Lessons From The Summit

Finding Solutions

The media, government and adults alike tend to take a one size fits all view of young people who gather for social interaction.

“MPs who talk about hugging a hoodie don’t know what their talking about....They don’t ask kids what they really feel before they make these comments”

Many young people do not agree with the standard definition of “gangs” and feel it far too easy to make assumptions.

“Not all young people who hang around in groups of three or more are up to no good, you can be in a gang but it doesn’t mean that you’re going to make trouble, people need to understand the difference”



“There are gangs out there that fit this stereotype of gang, but they are in the minority”

A lack of activities and the financial resources to access some facilities is considered a contributing factor to young people congregating in certain parts of the city. Whilst there may be lots of activities happening in Bradford for young people, many felt they were poorly advertised and could be expensive.

“Its easy to say that young people should be doing more worthwhile things, but where is there to go... Youth centres are closing down and different activities cost money”

However, some distinctions are being made about gangs and their importance to different groups of young people, in that there is safety in numbers in some parts of Bradford. More worrying is the growing tendency for those young people who carry weapons, and the fact that they perceive that they carry them for their own safety.

Whilst many believe there is a need for zero tolerance approach to weapons, some do not feel that the authorities are doing enough. More weapons amnesties should be considered by the Police as well as an increased visible presence to increase public confidence and deter weapon use.

A number of views and potential solutions for these issues have been summed up in a rap - created by young people attending this workshop.

***Gangs do I really have to be in one
There’s no life at the end of a bullet from a gun
It’s too expensive to go see a cinema show
And there’s not a lot of places for us to go
Weapons knives and guns are just a waste of time
When you pull the trigger you choose a life of crime
Let’s choose life put all this garbage in the bin
Some how, some day this is how we all win***

Many of the issues that young people want to discuss, particularly in their school environment, can be perceived by their adult peers as sensitive and in some instances taboo issues e.g. racism and extremism. There is still a growing need to create a safe environment for young people to discuss these issues, and they should inform the citizenship curriculum delivered in all secondary schools - and in this particular case, through Education Bradford.

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APRIL 2008

The “One Extreme to Another” play which looked at aspects of racism and extremism, demonstrated how far the environment has changed in Bradford. This is a city where media attention in the past has sought to highlight divisions rather than the potential for unity within different elements of the community.

“It clear that things have changed in Bradford when we can all sit in a room but feel a sense of being together when there are people in our communities that still do not want us to get along”

“There are a lot of people out there that don’t know the truth... they need to be educated about different cultures”

However, some young people still see the use of resources by central government and authorities as engendering yet more ‘divide and rule’ within communities from different cultural backgrounds. This clearly needs greater exploration.

evident to young people what tangible changes have been made as a result of their contributions.

But, this summit model of working - encouraging young people to become more politicised through teaching skills around lobbying, debating and becoming passionate about local and national issues, will be shared with Education Bradford as one to be introduced into their citizenship lessons, and across the wider youth sector through youth work provision.

The most significant legacy that the event has left in the minds of people who were present, was the atmosphere in the building, the engagement in the performances and workshops of young people, the respect shown to each other. Above all the creation of the ‘safe space’ that encouraged and allowed the social networking of young people across any perceived and acknowledged differences was something that they felt was needed within Bradford.

Summoning responses

The Summit was not meant to provide all the answers but was a starting point. Inevitably, there was a level of scepticism as to what would actually be achieved given that adults are not perceived to listen to many of the concerns raised by young people, and it is not always

The Bradford Youth Summit was the product of many years investment in young people by Bradford Youth Development Partnership, working in partnership with a range of strategic, research and delivery agencies.

For more information about Bradford Youth Development Partnership see www.bydp.co.uk



This study has been produced by the National Empowerment Partnership in Yorkshire and the Humber.

Two short videos of this event are available. One can be viewed at: www.theosmosisagency.com/online%20movie%20uploads/bys5min.html, and the other from COGS. Further information is available at yhep.org.uk

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“If we think about the similarities more than the differences, that can only help us!”

*Living In Harmony Workshop
- racism and extremism*

Focus

The Bradford Youth Summit (31st January 2008) was a unique opportunity for 240 young people from across Bradford to engage in the wider debate of on local services, facilities and relationship building in their city. The Summit provided a platform to empower young people to become part of the solution by asking them ‘what can I do?’ in responses to four key issues that affect young people, which had been devised by themselves through a wider consultation exercise across schools in Bradford.

The Summit was also a good example of partnership working between Joseph Rowntree Foundation, Education Bradford, Bradford Council, and Bradford Youth Development Partnership; and was supported by Government Office Yorkshire & Humber and the Regional Empowerment Partnership.

Key Learning

- » There is growing concern that resources set to come into Bradford as part of central government’s approach to the prevention of radicalisation and extremism may engender yet another ‘divide and rule’ process within communities from different cultural backgrounds.
- » Young people from different backgrounds and cultural perspectives want and need to play a significant part in myth busting. But more importantly they want an opportunity to share their own views and concerns amongst their peers and reflect these to decision makers - on the consequences and impact that programmes have on their lives.
- » A zero tolerance approach to weapons including more weapon amnesties and visible neighbourhood policing could reduce the amount of weapons, which are perceived to be easily available to young people on the streets. However, many young people who carry weapons do so in the belief that this protects their own safety.
- » Adults and the media alike, need to address the negative perceptions that are placed on groups of young people who gather for social interaction. Media coverage frequently fails to distinguish between ‘nuisance’ and ‘criminal’ behaviour, given the number of definitions that exist on gangs.
- » Not all young people who are gathered in three or more in number and wear clothing with hoods, or congregate on shop fronts and street corners, are involved in anti social or criminal behaviour. Many feel there is nowhere else to go or cannot afford financially to access local facilities
- » Discussions around racism and extremism are often considered to be uncomfortable areas for discussion in schools. There is still a growing need to create a safe environment for young people to discuss such issues, particularly for example, as part of the citizenship curriculum delivered in secondary schools.
- » Developing a neutral or non-territorial safe space for young people to interact and enhance their social networking is considered an important factor in contributing to the quality of life and enhancing cohesion with young people from different areas and cultural backgrounds in Bradford.