

WHO IS YOUR NEIGHBOUR?

Promoting Unity - Challenging Prejudice

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Who Is Your Neighbour? has been developed with partners from the Methodist, Roman Catholic and Anglican Churches, and the Muslim, Jewish and Buddhist communities in South Yorkshire.

The partnership emerged out of the experience of working together through the Sheffield Faith Leaders' Group to campaign against the divisive politics of those who promote racist policies and have a negative impact on community relationships and cohesion. This campaigning has taken place in the run up to local, national, and European elections.

South Yorkshire

The focus of this project is in the 4 boroughs of South Yorkshire: Barnsley, Doncaster, Rotherham and Sheffield.

Once a major European provider of steel and coal, much of South Yorkshire has been affected by industrial decline, and people, communities and local authorities struggle with some success to find a new post-industrial identity. Sheffield is the major city in the area and the fifth largest in England. New commerce and leisure facilities in an area of heavy population have provided some alternative employment opportunities.

This project is delivered through a dedicated Management Committee and will include extensive partnership working with other partners.

The Need for *Who Is Your Neighbour?*

- Yorkshire and Humberside recently elected (with 9.8% of the vote) an MEP whose ideology is one of a White Britain. South Yorkshire contributed heavily to that vote, eg 16% in Barnsley.
- Rather than a one-off protest, this reflects long term voting patterns.
- Less than 50% of survey respondents agreed that Rotherham was a place where people from different backgrounds get on well together. [Sheffield 53.3%, National 79.9%]
- Good practice exists [eg peace walks, interfaith forums, vigils, diversity festivals] but both the actions and their media coverage have been uncoordinated, making little impact, leaving the wider public largely ignorant of both threat and vision.
- We recognise that isolated projects are not enough, particularly because they often happen in multicultural areas, leaving adjacent white areas untouched.
- We need interaction involving and informed by people from 'all white' areas. We need to promote an informed and consistent media strategy, using agreed key messages to present a positive and contrasting narrative, so that all people within our area can make a real choice between division or a shared future.

We are now looking to develop ongoing activities, networks and a communications strategy that promote good community relationships and cohesion, as well as inclusive practice by faith groups and other community projects. We also plan to work closely with local churches, faith groups and others in developing appropriate reflection and dialogue where the influence of divisive politics is seen to be gaining ground.

Who Is Your Neighbour? aims to:

- a) Empower people to challenge racism and faith-based prejudice in vulnerable communities.
- b) Arrange interaction between groups/communities that do not ordinarily mix.
- c) Develop a communications strategy that will counter the effect of divisive reportage in the media.

Other stakeholders who we have or hope to engage in the work of this project include: -

- South Yorkshire Police
- Faiths Forums (Sheffield, Barnsley and Rotherham)
- Rotherham Ethnic Minority Alliance,
- Local politicians
- Together for Regeneration
- Anglican and Catholic Diocese
- Sheffield Methodist District
- Hope not Hate
- Unite against Fascism
- Representatives from participating congregations and projects
- Media Reps

Funding

This is a new project, set up with funds secured from the Equalities and Human Rights Commission [EHRC]. Due to the uncertainty of public finances that determine EHRC funds, funding is currently secure to March 2011 and expected then to be extended to December 2011, subject to confirmation by EHRC. However, both the project staff and Management Committee are committed to seeking further funding so that this important work can continue when current funding expires.