

The InterACT Project- SLOUGH

A case study demonstrating how a partnership between Aik Saath – Together as One; a mainstream youth organisation and Berkshire Education and Youth Centre, a local refugee community organisation led to a series of community events bringing together British Asian and Somali young people and the wider community.

“This project showed that people could work with anyone, it doesn't have to be their friends, it doesn't have to be people of the same skin colour or speak the same language...it means that they can communicate better with different people. I think that's what it created.”
Abdulla, young person, BEYC

About Aik Saath- Mainstream organisation

The words "Aik Saath" mean "Together As One" in Hindi, Punjabi and Urdu. Aik Saath believes in working together for positive social change. Their mission is to work with people from all communities, faiths and backgrounds to promote and encourage conflict resolution and community cohesion through training, campaigns and projects. Aik Saath was established in response to gang violence between young people from Asian backgrounds in Slough. The founders of the organisation believed that young people needed to lead the efforts to resolve this conflict. Over fourteen years later young people are still leading Aik Saath's efforts to build peace.

About Berkshire Education and Youth Centre (BEYC)- BME organisation

BEYC's goal is to provide young people with advice, guidance and support them to unlock their potential by empowering, engaging and motivating them through educational support and positive activities. BEYC was founded by dedicated volunteers from the Somali community of Slough, who realise the growing needs of this community. The needs of this community are going unmet and BEYC provides appropriate and culturally catered support, training, advice and information on wide range of issues such as education, health, substance misuse, employment, benefits, housing and organising leisure and recreational activities for young people as a vehicle for a positive change.

Aik Saath
Income: £104,000
No. of staff: 3
Coverage: Slough
Type of Organisation: Mainstream
Nature of Collaboration: joint delivery

BEYC
Income: £15,000
No. of staff: 15 volunteers, no paid staff
Coverage: Slough
Type of Organisation: BME
Nature of Collaboration: joint delivery

The Programme

InterACT is a programme run by the Citizenship Foundation that connects communities through social action. The programme brings 16-25 year-old asylum-seekers and refugees together with local young people to tackle issues affecting their communities. The overall goals are to break down barriers to integration, motivate young people, encourage local partnerships and highlight the valuable contribution that otherwise marginalised groups can make in building stronger and more inclusive communities. InterACT provides funding, a project structure and support for young people to take action on an issue that they identify in their community.

The programme recruits local organisations to partner with each other: one that works with local young people and one that works with young asylum seekers and refugees. A joint application was submitted from Aik Saath and BEYC to deliver the InterACT project in Slough based on a need identified in the community. After attending the two day partner training, Aik Saath and BEYC began working together to deliver the project in February 2012.

The Nature of Collaboration



The demographics of the local community have changed and a significant new Somali community has emerged in the locality made up of newly arrived economic migrants and refugees. This Somali community are struggling to be a part of the existing local community and have not been accessing services offered by existing voluntary groups. They are often socially excluded from the community and there are prejudices and negative stereotypes on both sides.

The two partner organisations have done some work together before and have considered delivering a project of this nature but had not had an opportunity to develop this due to a lack of time and resources. After meeting with the InterACT Project Coordinator separately, Aik Saath and BEYC met to discuss the opportunity and then submitted a joint application to participate. They then developed a partnership to deliver a joint social action project with the young people that they work with.

The partners supported their young people to come together and to discuss their understanding of community and identify key issues they feel face young people in Slough. One of the issues identified was the barriers young people face in socialising with those outside their communities. The idea of a football tournament eventually took shape and young people supported by staff organised and promoted the event that eventually saw over 100 young people from over 30 different backgrounds take part in the tournament. Young women from both projects worked together to organise a cultural showcase that attracted a similar number of young women to find out more about each other's cultures.

Benefits

The main benefit of working in partnership has been in bringing together two groups of young people that would not otherwise have had the opportunity to meet. The success in the project has been predominantly in the nature of the partnership and model of delivery. The project gave both Somali and British Asian young people an opportunity to have meaningful interaction with each other generating positive experiences between communities. This engagement challenges negative stereotypes and prejudices and gives these young people an opportunity to get to know the other and appreciate their similarities whilst acknowledging their differences in a way that contributes to a more cohesive society.

The legacy of the project is tangible and has delivered on the various outcomes for the project including; building confidence, breaking community barriers, increasing understanding between the groups by bringing them together in a social and familiar setting, promoting positive images of the communities and building relationships at an individual and group level. The successful partnership between these organisations has enabled this model to work in this way.

"This partnership enabled us to work with an organization and access a section of the community that were being overlooked by or not accessing other services"

Rob- Aik Saath

In working with the BEYC, Aik Saath has broadened the scope of their work to a new community, learning from a group that has the expertise and knowledge to work appropriately with this a new group of people. In working with Aik Saath, BEYC have been given the opportunity to work with a more established organisation and learn and develop their experience and skills in partnership working.

Challenges

Some of the challenges faced by the project were not specific to partnership working but part of working with young people. There were some issues around cultural differences which were faced both by the two partners organisations and reflected in the dynamics of the group. Where there were challenges around communication between the young people, this was seen as part of the process of understanding each other better and therefore although a barrier initially; a necessary part of the project.

A particular challenge was to ensure recruitment of female participants. To ensure girls were able to take part, partners decided to run two separate InterACT groups, for boys and for girls. However, they ensured that girls and boys came together for one session.

Learning and Advice

As both organisations have different levels of experience with partnership working this was a learning curve for both. Partners highlighted a number of key learning points:

- being open and honest and acknowledging that things may have to work differently when working with different community groups;
- taking time to reflect on the partnership both individually and together;
- appreciating each others contexts, challenges, as one isn't always aware of what other peoples situations are; and
- learning to really listen not just to language but also to actions and compromising where necessary

“Go for it- don't miss out on good opportunities to develop partnerships- move out of your comfort zone and their will be benefits for your organization in terms of improving services, profile and networks”
Faisal- BEYC

Reflections...

Our research has found that there is a role for infrastructure and support organisations to enable fair and equitable collaborations. Organisations that may not have the capacity and experience to develop and manage partnerships sometimes need the support and input of another organisation. The design of the InterACT programme is dependent on the partnership model. In order for this to be successful there has been a role to play by the support organisation as a facilitator at various crucial points of the project. This provided a form of impartial guidance and support and has helped the project through particular challenges. Where organisations are smaller and may not have the resources and expertise to always manage partnerships in the way that is required it is necessary to have support organisations that can offer their advice and support to address challenges and act as a sounding board to ensure the success of a partnership.