

Challenging Conversations: The Findings Event Report 30 June 2017

Introduction and background

Voluntary Action Leeds' *Challenging Conversations* project aimed to understand the drivers that may lead young people to commit hate crime. The project, funded by the Home Office, tested six different approaches to having a 'challenging conversation' with children and young people about their feelings about complex issues of race, identity and belonging.

The findings event, attended by more than 100 people, shared the key learnings from the project report and gave attendees the opportunity to discuss the recommendations and priority actions that could be taken in Leeds to reduce race hate crime in the future.

David Ford, Unit Head of the Office for Counter Extremism at the Home Office opened the event explaining out how the Home Office's Hate Crime Community Projects fund had been set up to try out new ways of dealing with hate crimes including, for instance projects to challenge transphobia in Cardiff and reducing mental health stigma in Carlisle. David explained that *Challenging Conversations'* approach of bringing people together to tackle their differences was particularly interesting. He also invited organisations to look out for the second round of funding, which becomes available at the end of July.

Councillor Coupar, Leeds City Council, Executive Member for Communities re-affirmed Leeds' commitment to tackling hate crime, set out some key themes and actions in the cities' Hate Crime Strategy; including providing refresher training to staff in Hate Incident Reporting Centres, and developing relationships with communities and community groups that encourage dialogue between people.

Henriette Mahamane, Leeds City Council and **Hannah Bailey**, Voluntary Action Leeds set out some of the key learning from the projects:

- Bringing young people from different backgrounds together really helps them to build new friendships
- Successful engagement needs extended commitment from practitioners to build trust
- Some organisations need to build their capacity to feel confident in having a 'challenging conversation'.
- Young people need support to tackle unexplored tensions around living in multi-linguistic communities
- Many young people don't understand what a hate crime is and don't make reports when they are victims.

Key outcomes/learning

Attendees discussed the findings and recommendations from the report and identified priorities for future action around hate crime.

Schools are critical to success

There was a widespread sense that it was important that schools do more to support young people to address their spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) relationship with race and belonging. There were no school representatives at the event, and few attendees had a clear view how schools address race issues; suggesting that at the very least, schools may need to promote what they do in this area widely and invite debate with parents about their approach. Some attendees reflected on the fact that schools are no longer required to report on hate incidents. They felt that without this reporting requirement it was possible that progress in schools to reduce incidents might stall.

Hate crime - understanding and reporting

Attendees felt more could be done to promote and develop people's understanding of hate crime and to encourage wider reporting. Attendees suggested that discussions could take place with communities, through third sector organisations, that widen the understanding of hate crime. Some attendees felt that a more visible campaign to encourage reporting was required with some making reference to useful social media apps that could aid reporting. Many attendees discussed the need for better feedback on the impact the hate crime reporting has made, and activity to build community confidence in making reports.

Capacity building and training for *Challenging Conversations*

There was lots of support for the *Challenging Conversations* approach of bringing people together and discussing how and why some people find issues around belonging difficult. However, some attendees felt that further capacity building is required to ensure that people have the confidence to start these conversations, and to ensure that conversations have a positive impact. Suggestions for action included; developing and / or collating resources that could support conversations (e.g. list of questions that could shape a conversation and age appropriate activities that could open up opportunities for conversations), providing training for *Challenging Conversations*, investigating ways to engage with adults and / or encourage adults to take the children to different parts of the city.

(Social) media – challenges and opportunities

Much debate focused on the role of media in constructing narratives (both positive and negative) around identity. Some attendees discussed how the media creates and sustains divisive views about particular communities and felt that work was needed with young people to deconstruct and challenge these narratives. Several attendees pointed to the impact of the 'echo chamber' effect of social media, meaning that people often only receive information from a narrow range of sources. Whilst recognising the challenges, some people also pointed to the positive potential of social media; for instance for hosting local and global campaigns for social justice or for bringing communities in closer contact with services (e.g. through hate crime reporting apps).

Inclusive communities in the lead

For many, the recent positive experience of 'Great Get Together' events (in memorial of Jo Cox MP) showed how communities can come together around a set of shared values. Some organisations were already bringing together communities through arts, culture and sport to celebrate shared interests and approaches. Some attendees felt that existing cultural events that are led by Council or other organisations could be adapted and/or new ones developed.

Equally, there is a need to encourage 'ground up' community based events that build relationships at 'street level'.

Making strategic linkages

There were a number of areas debate that focused on the need to make linkages between both organisations and plans / strategies. Some attendees talked about the potential to create a network that links organisations with similar strengths in different parts of the city together to enable 'cultural exchange' between people from different backgrounds. Others pointed out that learning from this project is applicable to other strands of hate crime (e.g. disability and LGBT) and that these lessons should be widely shared. Others challenged funders to promote opportunities more widely and / or strategic decision makers to ensure that the learning from Challenging Conversations is reflected in choices about how the city's approach develops.

Next steps and recommendations

Partners should consider these recommendations and consider whether what work should be taken forward as a result of these discussions:

- Strategic decision makers could incorporate learning from *Challenging Conversations* into relevant plans such as the Child and Young People's Plan and the Hate Crime Strategy
- VAL and Leeds City Council could work together to develop new networks of interested organisations and encourage collaboration and links between organisations in different parts of Leeds
- Partners could build on Challenging Conversations by capacity building with community based organisations that supports them in discussing identity with communities and / or enables them to organise / participate in cultural events.
- Partners could investigate projects to apply the learning from Challenging Conversations to other strands of hate crime.