

# Building Peace

in Diverse Britain

## Report of a conference held in Huddersfield on 7 May 2011



## *Introduction*

This event was organised by a project of Northern Friends Peace Board (NFPB), a Quaker organisation engaged in the 'active promotion of peace in all its height and breadth'. NFPB members come from throughout the North of Britain and we have an office and full-time Co-ordinator in Bolton.

- We are committed to addressing concerns around racism and conflict in our communities, with responses rooted in our Quaker approaches to peace, equality and integrity.
- We believe that peace can only be sustainable when built through non-violent means and by recognising the worth of each person.
- We aim to support and encourage people in positive action towards building communities and by creating a framework to allow openness, conversation and dialogue.
- We are arranging events that will bring people together from diverse backgrounds and perspectives, to learn and to support one another in building peace and tackling racism in our communities.

For the day conference in Huddersfield in May 2011, we asked: How do we live together better, with our varied backgrounds and experiences? Our aim was to promote dialogue and sharing, and to support positive, peaceful action in response to racism and community conflict.

More than 50 people attended, from places as far apart as Newcastle and London; most were from Yorkshire and Lancashire/ Greater Manchester. Participants chose from a series of workshops and also had time and space to talk over cups of tea and coffee and a vegetarian lunch. The following is a simple record of some of the key aspects of the workshops. We had a poet in residence – Steven Waling – with us throughout and the poem he presented us with in the closing session is reproduced at the end of this report.

## ***Some key areas of learning and discussion in the workshops***

### **Dialogue and listening**

Workshops focussed on personal approaches to and the wider context of dialogue. We were encouraged to be self-aware in this work, recognising our own barriers, our own and others' fears of change and our own and others values. Non-judgemental respect and humility are key attitudes, as in dialogue we learn *with* others.



Setting the scene for dialogue might mean thinking about the physical space being a comfortable one in which people can talk together. Confidentiality is another key component in creating a safe space for dialogue. Sometimes in dialogue we might need to push boundaries, to 'rock the boat'. Honest communication is important, but with freedom of speech comes responsibility for the effects of words on others.

We were encouraged to listen with attention and intention; sympathetic listening is paramount in building better relationships. A challenge put in one workshop was that minds are not changed by being told they are wrong. Our role may be to facilitate the articulation of problems, as people may be pushed to extremes if they feel that they are not listened to. Listening to and being in dialogue with, for example, those

who might support far-right groups or others with very different standpoints, can be very demanding. Role-playing these situations can be helpful and valuable preparation. We need to look for opportunities for further training and for sharing good practice.

## **Building trust**

To build trust, it was suggested, we need to look at commonalities rather than differences. This can be through the formal education settings or through ways of hearing one another's stories and other activities that help us stand in each others' shoes. Other factors to consider include what we want other people to know about us and whether being at peace with ourselves makes a significant difference.

Some of the work is about building trust, whilst other activities – such as trying to build a community of opposition to the far right – can lead to mistrust when different agendas are in competition.

## **Taking a stand**

There are systemic problems in society, with some groups in positions of dominance and others oppressed by this. We recognise the legacy of historic racism and division, although we can't be responsible for the actions of our forebears. What we can do is learn to be more effective allies, standing with those who are marginalised or oppressed today.

Too many media narratives convey little of the many positive ways in which people are coming together. Writing to the press with more positive stories can be a valuable and important action coupled with a commitment to challenge the negative stories. When faced with the prospect of far-right demonstrations, however, is it better to protest or stay away? We might want to put our energies into trying to diffuse tensions – to stop it kicking off – or on other occasions, look at working together to convey a positive 'united front' with others.

## *The workshops*

Participants had the opportunity to attend three different workshops during the day. The following are just snapshots and some key information about the workshops.

- **Authentic Listening & Ally Building**

Facilitator / speaker: **Liz Neat**, Director, National Coalition Building Institute, Lancashire

These two workshops consisted of input and facilitated exercises. In the first workshop, exercises invited participants to reflect on their own relationships and the importance of honest communication and to role-play dialogue between people of very different viewpoints. The second considered definitions of 'ally', the complexities of racism and importance of humility - taking the first step to becoming an ally. Participants were asked: How have you become a good ally? How can you be a good ally?

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- **Overview of the 'Who is your neighbour' project**

Speaker/facilitator: **Annie Turnbull** assisted by **Mariam Shah**, WIYN Management Committee member, and **Richard Slade**, PhD student and researcher

The workshop was a mix of input and reflections from the project, including giving participants an opportunity to role-play a particular scenario.

Learning from the project and suggestions for action were shared, focusing on the need for safe spaces for dialogue and for challenging the prevailing negative media narrative.

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- **Responses and possible alternatives to the EDL Presence in Bradford in 2010**

Facilitator / Speaker: **Lisa Cumming**, Co-ordinator, Programme for a Peaceful City (PPC)

Participants heard an account of the events in August 2010, with analysis and and discussion of the issues this raised for PPC and others. There had been deep concern about the possible repeat of the 2001 rioting. PPC is not an 'action-based' organisation, but through 'Stop it kicking off' (SIKO) worked through networks and contacts, building on trust, good communication and established relationships.

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- **Introducing the *dialogue programme of Blackburn Cathedral* and *The Role of Women in Building Peace in our Communities***

Speaker / facilitator: **Anjum Anwar**, Dialogue Development Officer, Blackburn Cathedral

The first workshop consisted of a presentation and discussion about the public dialogue work that Anjum developed in Blackburn with Canon Chris Chivers and has been involved in since 2005.

In the second workshop, she drew on her own experiences to talk about the role of women as individuals in the community. Some key points arising included; the journey towards peace may not be a peaceful one; be prepared to rock the boat and to push the boundaries from a stable core; be at peace with yourself before you can act for peace; it is important to build bridges and to recognise the role of mothers

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- **Responses to the EDL**

Speaker / facilitator: **Chris Howson**, Bradford Soulspace

This workshop drew on the speaker's and participants' experiences of dealing with EDL demonstrations in different communities. Difficult issues include whether to engage in dialogue with EDL supporters and whether it is right to ask people opposed to the EDL (include Muslims in particular) to stay at home when the EDL demonstrate.

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- **The Engaging Museum**

Facilitators **Mashuda Shaikh**, Kirklees Museums and Galleries.

Outreach Officer & **Kim Strickson** Kirklees Museums and Galleries - Coordinator

The workshop explored ways of engaging diverse communities in projects. It focused on looking at commonalities rather than differences by concentrating on three successful projects that have successfully engaged the community; Stories in a Suitcase, Significant Places and Cabinets of Curiosity. The group were invited to imagine filling a cabinet about themselves; what would they like others to know about them?

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- **Current Developments in the Far-Right**

Speaker/facilitator: **Andy Sykes**, anti-racism worker, Bradford

The workshop was a mix of input and discussion about current and changing state of the far-right groupings in Britain. This covered the declining fortunes of the BNP, the growing support for the English Defence League and the role of the media and education in challenging the thinking that creates a culture of support for these groups.

## *Some feedback from the day*

**We are grateful for the positive comments and the constructive criticism, which we shall be seeking ways to incorporate in planning future events.**



*“Very interesting and a lovely atmosphere. The genuine care and concern of the participants and individual commitment was inspiring.”*

*“Interesting workshops containing valuable discussions and interactions with workshop leaders. Lovely lunch. But no time to hear how other workshops went.”*

*“I found the day very uplifting in that it is good to know that there are people from diverse backgrounds who are willing to put their time and effort into to pursue a more peaceful Britain. It would have been good to have had time to find out what happened in the workshops that I couldn't attend. The final session could have been more structured and the time used to give a brief*

*over-view of all of the workshops.”*

*“It was a fab day, for me there was no low point. High point probably gathering with such a great bunch of people and the opportunities that present themselves!”*

*“I simply wanted to hear about people's work and meet other people working in dialogue work. These were met although of course its not always possible to talk to everyone you intended to talk to.”*

*“I was really open-minded and was keen to have a hands on workshop instead of a one way conference. It was indeed very positive that these could be interactive and people could ask questions/ and voice out their experience.”*

*“Really appreciated the mixture of participants and, as someone more accustomed to national events, the relationships that were clearly being established across northern towns. Well done NFPB!”*

“The day was well arranged with the delivery team apparently working as a well oiled clock. If

this was not the case it certainly didn't show. Well done to everyone and many thanks for a fruitful day.”

*“How do you persuade people to come together in the first place in order to listen to one another? do they have to be in the same room at the same time? Are there other ways of doing it?”*



# Collage of Listening

(Building Peace in Diverse Britain, Huddersfield, May 7, 2011)

by Steven Waling

## Shall we share

Nobody's interested in listening to me  
I come from a hell of a mess flags of  
St George / specialists in halal meat /  
Live sports shown here anger builds up

Shall we share a few moments people  
in their rooms just passing in corridors  
how's it going fine of silence  
I come from faith no faith ethnic

where I'm coming from it's so hard  
to stand for that identity / this identity /  
that identity and I'm invisible lines  
you don't cross you should know who  
you are but I don't passing in corridors  
they don't want to hear certain words

## a few moments

Nobody's interested in me how do I  
talk to them whose voice is not heard  
dog collar and headscarf walk together  
down the same street Eyebrows raised

why do you keep driving planes into our  
buildings shall we share I'm nosy  
So easy to forget what it is not to be  
listened to a few moments how do I talk

to them in a moment of lucidity let's  
share food together we are listening  
really not being taken seriously but  
we pass in corridors I come from here  
there everywhere could we have conversation  
of silence to me interested in listening

### **of silence**

Not the same as agreeing we had to rock  
the boat shall we live with the other  
I'm interested in listening share to you  
poetry actually happening moments my son

walking down the road Paki can even be  
a positive word conversation of silence  
come into the corridors let's talk of  
small steps big they present a natural

narrative will you share me your story  
I come from a whole range of people  
finding a place moments easy to forget  
when you're told not to talk of yourself  
but there's still a future let's forget  
urgency time interested in listening to



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*Photographs by Dave Cowan*