

REFLECTIONS ON PROCESS : BRIDGE BUILDERS PRESTON

This short paper makes some reflections on the process used in the Bridge Builders Preston Pilot Project (see the project report for description of what was done) and suggests how it might be taken up by others, in other areas.

We believe that reflection on practice is an essential tool for every professional or voluntary community activist who wishes to be more effective, and that it is best done working interactively with peers and guided by responsive facilitators. Concentrating on issues arising from specific stories or local case studies rather than beginning with theory or principles has numerous educational benefits. There is a particular value in working through issues with others from different backgrounds, experiences and value commitments, who bring fresh perspectives to discussions. In Bridge Builders Preston we were able to draw on a wide range of experiences from a range of public sector agencies and faith communities and projects. This wide base and our inductive approach gave the project its strength.

We believe our process involving a local broad based steering group, one to one interviews, and two public workshops spread over a twelve month period and costing only £10k is a viable model for use in other areas, although the scale and cost might be greater in a large London borough or bigger city such as Birmingham or Manchester. The notes which follow address some of the practicalities and things we have learned from and about the process.

Bringing People together for valuable conversations across faiths and sectors depends upon:

- Having someone (or more) with the time to do the preliminary networking and scoping research which requires a lot of face to face contact.
- That person must be knowledgeable, about religion and the local community work scene, cross culturally sensitive, be seen as coming from a neutral corner and trusted or able to build trust.

- Allies or friends in the public sector and in the faith sector who can see the significance of working together, and are willing to commit some time to give interviews and attend workshops.
- Good communication and keeping all relevant people informed throughout the process.

Discovering the salient issues involves:

- Avoiding pre-conceived ideas and being willing to listen carefully and share information and ideas openly.
- Not being put off by language, ideas and beliefs which are from one side based on theologies and faith commitments, and on the other based on legal and statutory obligations.
- Recognising that individuals have personal commitments as well as professional roles and sometimes need to distinguish between them and the different forms of accountability that go with wearing different hats.
- When interviewing people it is important to establish a contract about confidentiality or anonymity in advance and to abide by it.
- A topic guide is helpful (see our example), though it should be used flexibly.
- It proved surprisingly hard when interviewing professionals to gather connected and extended stories about incidents, people or projects which illustrated important learning points. It would appear that professionals in both statutory and faith sectors have a tendency to talk in abstract generalisations.
- Workshop sessions need to be interactions in which all people can participate and share their experiences and raise questions. (see our workshop guide notes for ideas). Good facilitators are essential and note takers / flip chart writers should be briefed in advance to take extensive high quality notes.

Practicalities

- Thought is needed to identify the most appropriate venue, timing and catering arrangements for workshops. For example in Preston we

- deliberately avoided the month of Ramadan, Diwali and the run up to Christmas, and ordered only vegetarian food.
- Feedback of any draft reports or other documents to participants before final publication is essential.

Further Lines to Pursue

- While there has undoubtedly been much learning and useful networking in Preston for the participants it is important to follow through on the implications by good dissemination of our findings.
- Although making a report available on paper and on the web is essential it is not sufficient to make much impact on policy makers in either sector.
- If possible one should arrange personal or small group briefings with senior statutory officers, Council members, regeneration boards etc. to underline the significance of findings.
- If one of the desired follow ups is a programme of training events (perhaps local religious literacy for the statutory sector and capacity building or jargon busting for the faith sector) it is important to identify resources both financial and human at an early stage so momentum is not lost.

Appendices

Cover the practicalities of organising workshop events and interviewing:

- [Outline interview guide](#)
- [Check list of issues](#)
- [Invitation letter programme](#) and [booking form](#) for workshop 1
- [Programme for workshop 2](#) including [group exercises](#)
- [Guidelines for presenters and workshop leaders](#)
- [Check list for event planning](#)

OUTLINE INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR BRIDGE BUILDERS PRESTON

This tape recorded interview will be treated as confidential and anonymous in any quotations used in the project report. However, we may come back to ask you permission to use original or edited material you have supplied as case studies for discussion in workshops, or ask you personally to present your story and reflections on it in these or future sessions, or in publication in various media.

Name

Organisation.

Date of Interview

Interviewer

Please tell me about yourself and your role in the organisation

Please give a brief outline of the history of your group / section / project.

Please describe the areas and processes in which you have engaged in partnership (or other functions such as regulation, funding, politics) between statutory agencies and faith / religious groups..

How have you found these relationships? Please give examples of both good and problematic experiences / relationships?

Reflecting on these experiences what do you think has been learned?

What still needs to be learned... improved... a) on your side b) on the other side

Check list of issues

- Do statutory agencies trust faith groups to be partners?
- What are the limitations imposed on faith groups working with statutory funding and on people of faith working within statutory agencies?
- Is there a clear corporate policy about faith groups and faith issues from the statutory side or does it depend on individual officer's interpretation?
- How do faith groups relate to the multiplicity of statutory agencies. Eg. Council depts, health, police, Surestart, LSC etc.....doubly so in a two tier local authority structure like Preston..
- Is there a clearly defined boundary between what is seen as faith/religion and what is seen as community/ethnicity/culture?
- Is the boundary between sacred and secular different in different faiths / denominations?
- Where are the clashes of values, culture, practice between faith groups and the statutory world? How far do faith groups keep a radical and challenging edge that is willing to question the powers that be?
- What about practical issues such as timing and venue of meetings
- Is there a gap between the formal, target driven accountability ethos with its focus on outputs and outcomes and the informality of many faith groups? How should we approach softer, longer term, community development outcomes in terms of faith?
- What happens when people from across the sectors try to talk to each other using different language? Is it possible to build understanding and trust?
- Are there particular issues around equal opportunities policy and practice...in employment and service delivery?
- Are agencies and faith group keeping up with rapid social, economic, generational and cultural changes which may generate new need and opportunities?
- Is there competition, politics and envy between faith communities over funding decisions?
- How much do successful bids depend on individual star quality?
- Are there areas of ignorance or misunderstanding across the sectors?
- Are the voluntary contributions of faith and community groups taken for granted or exploited as free labour by the statutory side?

Invitation Letter

Faith in the Statutory Sector Bridge Building Workshop 1

Thursday 15th September 2005 From 12 noon to 4pm

***At The New St Augustines Centre,
St, Austins Place, Avenham, Preston***

The Bridge Builders Action Research Project (working through University of East London and funded by The MB Reckitt (formerly Christendom)Trust) , working with the Preston Faith Forum is running two half day workshop events this autumn. The aim is to bring together people working in the statutory sector with those working for religious and faith based organisations to get to know each other and to share experience and develop better practice in partnership working.

We hope the sessions will be valuable training and professional development opportunities The workshops are intended for people from Preston and surrounding parts of Lancashire who are:

- officers and members of public sector bodies, such as the local councils, the NHS, the Police etc.
- leaders and staff of churches, mosques, temples, faith based community centres, projects and organisations.
- Anyone working in any sector in such fields as urban regeneration, social services, community health, Surestart projects, community development, youth and community work and sports and leisure services.

The workshops will be free and include a buffet meal. Booking is essential as places are limited and catering arrangements need to be ordered in advance. Please complete the attached booking form and return it by post or email by 10th September.

AIM AND FORMAT OF WORKSHOP 1

The format of this first workshop is participatory and interactive. We would like everyone attending to share their experiences, stories and questions about relationships between faith communities and religious organisations on the one hand, and the authorities and funding bodies on the other. We recognise that some people will have experiences from both sides, perhaps as professionals in the working week and as a volunteer in their local faith group in “spare” time.

To start us thinking we hope to have a guided tour of the new St Augustines Centre.

Then after lunch we will hear three brief stories from local projects based in different faith communities in Preston, which will focus on the issues that arise when working in partnership with statutory bodies.

We will then break into smaller groups with a facilitator to reflect on the stories we have heard and compare them with our own experiences.

A final plenary session will draw the themes from the day together.

The second workshop in a couple of month’s time will consider in more detail how best to tackle together any of the problems and issues that have been identified in the workshop or in the interviews that have been carried out as part of the project. This is planned for Wednesday November 23rd from 4pm to 8pm (at Preston Town Hall). Please put the date in your diary now. It will be really helpful if participants can commit themselves to attending both workshops as they are intended to be part of a single learning process.

Please pass on this information to anyone you think may be interested and use your electronic mailing lists to let people know of what we are planning.

For further information or if you have questions Contact

**Greg Smith (Bridge Builders Workshop)
34 Broadgate
PRESTON
Lancs.
PR1 8DU**

Phone no. 01772 827987

Email: credoconsultancy@maister-smith.fsnet.co.uk

Booking Form:

Faith in the Statutory Sector Bridge Building Workshop 1

Thursday 15th September 2005 From 12 noon to 4pm

At The New St Augustines Centre, Avenham, Preston

Please Book _____ place (s) and lunch (es)

For: Names:

1.
2
3

Organisation: _____

Mailing Address

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Phone (s) _____

Email Address _____

Please return this form by 10th September to

Greg Smith (Bridge Builders Workshop)
34 Broadgate
PRESTON PR1 8DU

Phone no. 01772 827987

Email: credoconsultancy@maister-smith.fsnet.co.uk

Bridge Builders Preston

- Thursday September 15th 12-4pm
- Venue St. Augustines New Avenham Centre

12-12.30... Welcome and introductions to what it is all about

plenary presentation of the story of St Augustines as an example..
perhaps with a tour

12.30- 1.30 pm Lunch in groups round tables.. with a task to get to know each other and share stories of projects / partnerships they have been involved in..

1.30...2.30 Presentations from 3 / 4 other Projects sharing their stories

- Salvation Army ? open Door project
- GHS (culture and dance project)

2.30 3.45 pm Working Groups (selected to give

- The task is to identify and document on the basis of one of the stories heard today and wider experience
 - The opportunities and benefits of partnership working
 - The really difficult issues
 - questions we need to address in the second workshop in November

3.45... Just a brief report back session.

**Faith in the Statutory Sector
Bridge Builders Preston : Workshop No,2**

- Wednesday November 23rd 4-7pm
- Venue Preston Town Hall ;Entrance in Lancaster Road; Preston PR1 2RL
- (you can download a map and travel instructions from <http://www.preston.gov.uk/Documents/Maps/PrestonMap.pdf>)

PROGRAMME

4pm... Registration and Tea

4.15 pm Welcome and re-introductions to what it is all about

4.30 Interim report presented by *Greg Smith..*

*Key issues emerging from the Bridge Builders Consultation
Process for partnership between Faith Organisations and the
Statutory sector in Preston and Lancashire*

5pm -6pm: Workshops : Bearing in mind the presentation and your own experiences

Stream A: Design a project and fill in funding application...for CDF...Note the frustrations, compromises... difficulties...

Stream B: Design a policy for the local authority for working with faith based organisations in : consultation, project development and funding, stipulating equal opps aspects and what can and can't be done with public money..

6pm.. Plenary : Drawing everything together... What Next?

6.30pm.. Soft drinks and Snacks

7pm Finish

GROUP A:

Imagine you are the steering group of a local temple mosque or church. You want to develop a youth club project, for kids from the local community to give them something constructive to do, and you hope that it will encourage them to develop spiritually and commit themselves to your faith community. But you know you haven't got the capacity to do this until you can put together a professional looking bid for funding a new youth hall and a youth worker post... You've just seen the guidelines and forms for the new Faith Communities capacity building fund from CDF..

Your task is to work through the form trying to write in a first draft of answers with reference to the guidelines..... Please make notes about difficulties it presents

GROUP B:

Imagine you are a policy forming body within the local authority and that for the first time ever you are designing a set of guidelines for the relationship with faith based organisations and religious groups in the locality. The main elements of this relationship will be around

- Funding of projects
- Support and capacity building for organisations development
- Community consultation and representation of faith communities
- Use of places of worship and associated community centres and halls by council departments.
- Partnership building and networking with other communities for community cohesion

You will need to specify the authorities expectations of faith based groups, particularly where they receive any public money in terms of what they are allowed to do and not allowed to do, and what is good practice around:

- Financial accountability
- Providing evidence that they are delivering a service
- Recruitment and management of staff and volunteers
- Ensuring the service is accessible to anyone who can benefit from it.
- Appropriate policies and procedures that should be in place
- How religious activities relate to the programme.

Guidelines for Presenters

Tell the **story** of your project... Make sure you get the vision across

- **Be creative**... make use of pictures, project literature, interview users or whatever...
- **Be reflective**... focus on the issues and incidents that concern the relationship between the statutory agencies / funders and your organisation as a faith community group... were there any misunderstandings.. conditions you had to negotiate.. points of mutual learning
- **Be forward looking**the next steps.....any problems still to resolve
- **Be brief** .. you have a strict 15 minutes.. maybe you want to do 10 minutes talk and leave 5 for questions

Guidelines for Workshop Group Facilitators

Appoint a scribe in the group... we would like fairly detailed notes of the discussion either on flip chart or note book.

Concentrate on one of the presentations only... but don't stop people pointing out similarities and differences with the other case studies

Make sure everyone knows each other at the beginning but don't let them give a full life story

Make sure everyone contributes to the discussion and no one dominates. It may be helpful to have a rule "no one speaks twice until everyone has spoken once"

Keep the group to task..

- The task is to identify and document on the basis of one of the stories heard today and wider experience
 - The opportunities and benefits of partnership working
 - The really difficult issues in respect of faith communities working with the state
 - questions we need to address in the second workshop in November when we want to develop some guidelines for good practice in partnership

Get people to reflect on what the project has done and keep asking "why" or "what could have been done differently" (for better or worse outcomes).

Check List for event Planning

Publicity

What combination of letters, email, phone calls and personal contact are needed to make sure a good number of people attend from all sectors and faiths.

Does information contain all that is necessary and relevant, such as directions, times, date (see our model)

Programme

Who will chair / MC / facilitate the whole event.

Who will be available to do back up jobs like sort problems with registration, catering, venue, signage etc.

Who are the key speakers... Have they confirmed attendance .. time ..been briefed re timing, style and audience

Do they need or are they bringing own equipment for projection etc.

Who will facilitate and scribe for each small group session?

Produce...clear group leader guidelines..

Flip Charts, stationery, pens, blue tack

Catering

In House, outside or DIY catering?

What's the budget and payment method?

Is the food and drink appropriate for a mixed faith gathering?

Are people able to specify in advance their dietary needs and can you respond adequately?

What crockery / cutlery is available / required?

Information Pack

Have you got useful materials and the resources of time/money to produce a useful pack for delegates?

Besides a flier on Project background, and programme we were able to put together a pack of fliers and summary briefing papers from related agencies working in the field.