

Learning Programme 2007/08 Taking forward Integration, Equality & Cohesion

As part of the Learning Plan for VAF funded projects, a Learning Set exploring priorities for integration, equality and cohesion was held on 14 November 2007. 36 attendees from across the (Race Equality Integration & Community Support Fund and the Scottish Refugee Integration attended this session.

It was interesting to note that the participants who were divided into 6 discussion groups which independently identified quite synergistic ideas and proposals. They were more far reaching and insightful than one could have hoped for and provide some food for thought for the development of future policy and associated funding strategies. Figure 1 details pictorially the outcome of these discussions.

Participants were at this point thinking around taking forward equality and integration in its widest sense. We had entered into this thinking via a presentation from Douglas Guest of ECHR where the concept of human rights as the cornerstone for driving equalities had fired up the thinking of the participants.

The participants strongly advocated that human rights should be the driving force behind all equalities based work. It is not 'strand specific' and accordingly can encourage a more equal and hence holistic approach to tackling issues underlying strand specific work such as race equality, gender equality etc.

Figure 1 was produced by one group in an attempt to encapsulate how the community cohesion and equality were linked and within this what needed to be tackled to take it forward. It does however capture well the themes of all of the discussions.

Community Cohesion was a common term utilised and was done so with the aim of encapsulating a cross equality approach to inclusion and cohesion.

The need to build a strong foundation of '**citizenship**' reflects the need for the 'whole community' to recognise the inequalities in society and work together in tackling it. Examples of this kind of work would be work going on in schools with young people on developing shared understanding and tackling racist attitudes through group work.

Participants felt that communities and individuals needed support in taking forward their role within communities hence the requirement for **community capacity building** in its widest sense. Strong communities are better enabled to take solutions to integration at a community level and work with statutory agencies on breaking down barriers and promoting the uptake of solutions and services.

Support for **integration** has been built in since those who face the greatest barriers cannot overcome them without interventions to support them (from refugee and asylum seeker support through to support for the disabled, support for gender equality etc.)

Figure 1 – Summarising Community Cohesion, Integration & Equalities



In terms of tackling integration and support to asylum seekers and refugees there was concern about the need to support those most destitute in order to ensure that their human rights are not being violated in ignoring this.

There were also concerns around supporting separated children and other vulnerable groups, responding to changing needs within communities across Glasgow, developing more joined up approaches and engaging with other key players e.g. Glasgow Community Planning Partnership.

A common theme running across the groups was the need to **improve access** to education, services, resources and opportunity by those most marginalised. In doing so, the individual is able to build their own solutions and promote their own inclusion and from this contribute fully to community cohesion. It relates to community capacity building, citizenship and integration and is underpinned by human rights. It is however something distinct and tangible and from this measurable in the short to medium term whilst the longer term aspirations/outcomes are being developed.

Participants were actually strongly advocating that a cross equality approach to tackling inequality/racism/exclusion/barriers could be liberating and empowering for communities. For example, they took the view that just tackling a race agenda can be limiting and lead to further pigeon holing and potentially perpetuate discrimination. From this more than one group were advocating that there requires to be more done to engage with 'mainstream or white communities around tackling racism and barriers to inclusion'. Whilst they rightly had concerns around how strategies and funding would work in practice in taking forward this approach, they were advocating that the aspiration to be working cross equality was indeed a worthwhile one.

It also highlights the evolution of some of these communities from being focussed on race to being focussed on cohesion and human rights. Racism and its barriers may still be prevalent and still require dedicated intervention but organisations are suggesting that the motivations and methods need to be more holistic.

They were also strongly advocating that services need to be better joined up with real partnership working in place. But, they were realistic around the development of this – particularly in relation to developing joint working with local authorities/statutory services. There is quite a fear developing around the emphasis of CPP's and local authorities being the lead agencies within communities as there is a poor track record of real engagement with the voluntary sector in tackling prevalent need.

Despite this, their aspirations for more comprehensive joined up services working together to target need still came to the fore.

Participants were clear that future funding programmes need to be better aligned to strategy/ policy priorities. The participants welcomed the approach taken by REICS where they were encouraged to link their work to national strategy and be recognised as a 'movement for change' rather than a distinct project within a community/local setting.

Aside from linking this local work to national strategy setting, it reduced the isolation some projects potentially experience and assisted them with developing practice.

In summary

Participants have identified some key overarching themes which could form the basis of future funding priorities provided they can be linked into policy priorities. These include:

- Promoting Community Cohesion (participation, citizenship, joint approaches to reduction of barriers – cuts across all equality areas)
- Supporting Integration (refugee & asylum seeker support, race equality work, disability related work)
- Improving Access for All (disability, race, gender, age)
- Developing Community Capacity

The overall mission supporting this work is “***A better integrated Scotland where there is mutual respect for and acceptance of all people***” and this if founded around the need to promote and ensure that human rights are met.