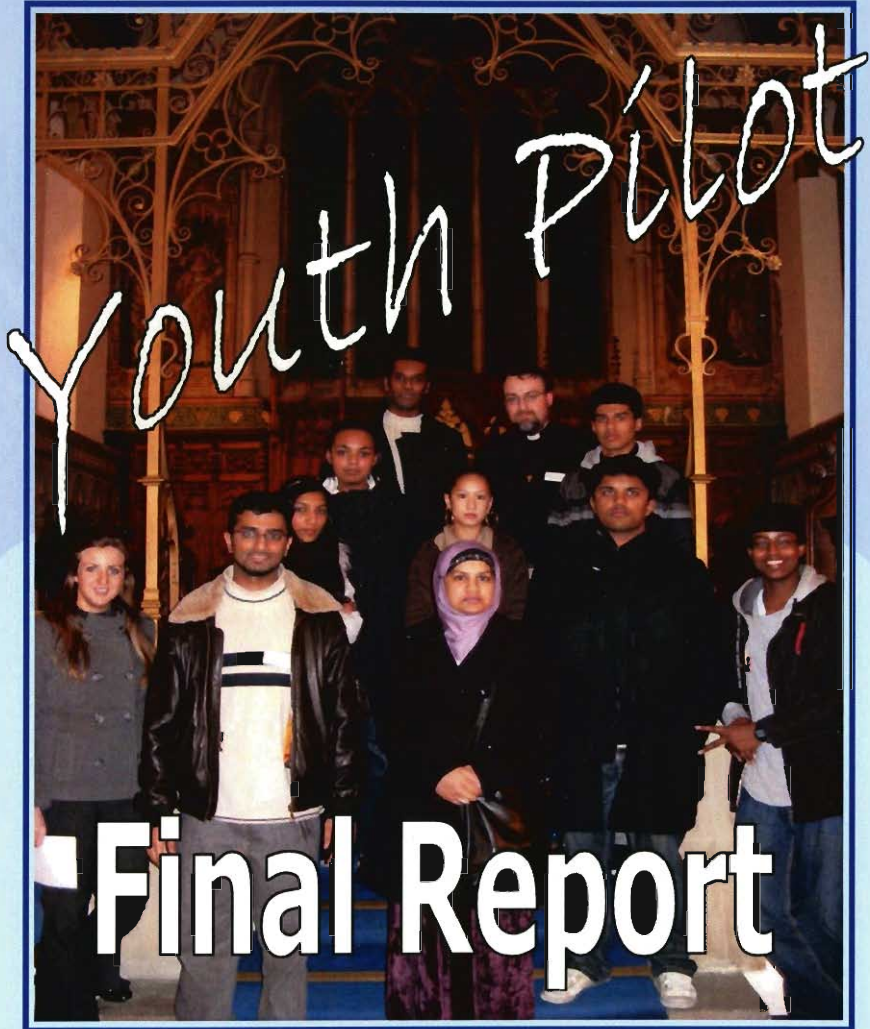


Faithful Friends



Final Report

Funded by

Genesis
Community

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Initial aims and objectives

The aim of the Faithful Friends project was to run a one year local interfaith pilot, specifically designed for and by local young people from the different faith communities in the London Borough of Newham. The pilot aimed to improve relations and build friendships between young people of different faiths, to dispel fear and mistrust improving feelings of safety amongst the young people, their families and the wider community. The pilot aimed to increase the capacity of the Faithful Friends Project to widen its membership and improve the range and quality of activities it aims to deliver.

Objective Two

The second objective was for young people's fears of mistrust and prejudice will be challenged, leading to a greater feeling of safety in their local area, which will permeate through to their families and other members of their faith community.

Objective One

The first objective was for 25 young people from the different faith communities in Forest Gate to have built friendships, to have developed an understanding of different faith traditions, to have improved their ability to participate in discussions, to

Objective Three

The final objective was to enable Faithful Friends to build on the success of its current activities. The pilot will be a direct voice from the young people themselves, how the current adult group can best incorporate youth into their programmes and activities.

Evidence of Need for the Project

Faith leaders and youth workers within the different faith communities involved with Faithful Friends, had asked for a similar programme that would appeal and be relevant to young people within their communities.



Forest Gate, where Faithful Friends is based, has over a quarter of its population in the 15-24 age group. (Neighbourhood Information Management System, 2007). Newham has four main faith communities: Christian 46.8%, Muslim 24.3 %, Hindu 6.9%, and Sikh 2.8% (2001 Census). Faith communities from each of these four traditions are strongly involved in the work of Faithful Friends,

Newham has long been established as a culturally, ethnically and religiously diverse place, with a good history of positive relations between the different communities. This is especially evident in the feeling of strong cohesion in its local primary schools. However, young people have noted that as they progress through their teenage years, differences between their peers becomes more



obvious and can lead to mistrust, prejudice and segregation creeping in.

This has also too been exasperated by national and even international events, which have had a negative impact on some of the local communities. For example the Police anti-terrorism raid in Forest Gate in June 2006



(see <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/5040022.stm>).

Phil And Kirstie's View

Just a few miles to the east of the super-rich City, Newham has to face lots of challenges. Health, unemployment, crime and teenage pregnancy levels are alarming. It has many of the downsides of living in London and few of the benefits - except the kind you get off the social. Hopefully the local regeneration project will help give Newham some new hope. [www.channel4.com/4homes/on-tv/best-and-worst/...](http://www.channel4.com/4homes/on-tv/best-and-worst/)

“

The Newham Generals' walking tour of their Forest Gate manor in east London begins, appropriately enough, with a bottle-strewn backstreet known as Dead Man's Alley.

Three of The Newham Local Strategic Partnership Priorities are directly relevant to the pilot project: building an active and inclusive community, investing in young people, and making Newham safer.

”

Engagement and Recruitment

Faithful Friends Youth Project co-ordinators held meetings with faith leaders and youth workers from the following local places of worship:

Ramgharia Sikh Gurdwara



Minhaj al Quran Mosque



Gurdwara Namdhari Sangat



Sri Murugan Temple



St Anthony's RC Church



S'ai Baba Community



St John's Church



Emmanuel Church



The Sessions

Session one

Venue: Minhaj al Quran Mosque, Forest Gate

Activities: Shared meal, 'Human Bingo' (ice breaker), 'Challenge our Stereotypes' Activity – 15 photos were spread out in the middle of the room each of different young people. In groups of mixed faiths, the young people discussed whether they could guess what faith the young people in the photos were from just by looking. We found some of our stereotypes were challenged, and it led to some very interesting and open conversations which was very encouraging and a great start.

Examples of some of the images



Session two

St John's Church, Stratford

Activities: Shared meal, tour of the church with plenty of opportunities for questions and answers.

Exercise 1: Line activity, the young people had to put themselves in to different orders in response to a set of statements/questions, e.g. how many hours a week do you spend worshipping, how many hours a week do you spend in your place of worship. Everyone had the opportunity to explain their position in the line. It was interesting that some young people felt they only worshipped when they went in to their place of worship, whereas others felt they could worship in many different places other than an actual 'place of worship' e.g. Mosque, Temple.

Some of the young people shared they feel more likely to worship in a place of natural beauty rather than in a building designated as a place of worship.

Many were surprised that these differences were not divided along faith lines, but in fact showed differences within the same traditions, and similarities between different communities.



Exercise 2: We then looked together at lots of different images on a slide show such as expensive clothes, beautiful scenery, places of worship, families and more, and discussed together what importance we placed on what the images represented. Many of the young people admitted that they placed a high value on expensive items and celebrities, although they all agreed that even more value is placed on families.



Session three

Venue: Ramgharia Gudwara, Forest Gate

This was a special joint meeting with the adult Faithful Friends group.

Activities: Shared meal provided generously by the Gudwara Committee. Tour of the main room where the services and worship took place by the Gudwara committee members and president, and the young people had the opportunity to ask questions which were very thoughtful and interesting.



Exercise: In four mixed groups of both young people and adults, Images were drawn on large pieces of paper of what places were important and those seen as negative to us. Each group then fed back to describe the drawings.

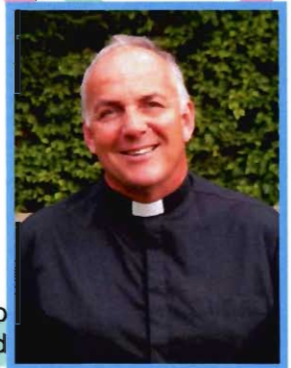


Session Four

Venue: Froud Centre, where the S'ai baba community in Manor Park meet

Activities: shared meal generously provided by the S'ai baba community.

Presentation from The Revd Canon Duncan Green Church of England who is the Olympics Executive Co-ordinator. Duncan spoke to us about how committed he is to working to ensure the legacy of the Games has a positive impact on local communities in the decades to come.



The young people had an opportunity to ask Duncan how they could get involved in the lead up and during the Olympics.



There was a real feeling of pride that Newham had been chosen to host most of the Olympics, and that the world's eyes would have the chance to see Newham in such a good way.

Session five

Venue: Froud Centre

Activities: Shared meal.

Exercise: those that attended the previous meeting fed back on their thoughts of the Olympics.



Exercise: Two video clips from youtube which featured young people thinking about the upcoming Olympics and activities that had been held to celebrate. The young people split in to three groups each with its own paper Olympic ring, on which they wrote 'what would they show visiting yp to Newham' and 'what next for faithful friends youth.' This combined thinking ahead to the Olympics on our doorstep, and the continued role of Faithful Friends.

Comments/feedback from the Young People at our two final sessions...

What would you show to visiting young people from around the world in Newham?

Different religious celebrations e.g. processions
Diversity of foods/culinary experiences and the variety of shops
Sightseeing – O2 arena, docklands area, city airport, excel, hackney marshes, Epping Forest, sports e.g. West Ham FC
Multi cultural aspect - many religions living side by side
Non-stop city
Dynamic creative energy

Continued...

Social consciousness
Make a positive difference as a group – recognition
Opportunity to develop learn and achieve (education) – sharing and learning from each other
Engaging and creative activities
Accepting of differences – cultural diversity
Vibrancy of London
Tour of Newham e.g. Froud Centre, parks, places of worship e.g. temples, school/college visits.

What next for Faithful Friends youth?

Cultural gathering – bringing people together, 2/3 day event, well publicised – take groups to other settings
Use of hard hitting images to get everyone's attention e.g. 9/11
Go as a group to other youth groups etc. To show what we do rather than inviting people 'in'
Have a film or recording of a meeting/session to show others
Issues – environment & ecology, identity and meaning, educational & career aspirations, lack of exposure to the world – FEAR

How – drama, "who am I"? – tackle fears – bring put fears and challenge/address them

Young people explore/express their identity

Active – link to practical/service task

Newsletter, social networking "faith book"!

Role plays, visits to youth centres, video, cakes, baking, communal activities

"faith tree"

Share favourite quotes from scriptures

Community walks/nature walks

Personal development e.g. confidence

Speak at school assemblies

Go on 'discovery missions' – fact finding to other places of worship and listen

Ice breakers – quiz

SWOT Analysis

<p>Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">* the young people themselves* the hospitality of the places of worship we met in* the quality of the discussions* the willingness of the young people to engage with the activities and discussions* young people from each of the four main faith communities in Newham: Muslim, Christian, Sikh and Hindu	<p>Weaknesses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">* low response from faith-based youth groups, especially Christian and Sikh* turnover of young people at each meeting
<p>Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">* interest from new faith leaders and communities* the ideas for future directions for the project from the young people* young people expressing an interest in planning and coordinating the sessions* being invited to give presentation in places of worship/youth groups to recruit new youth	<p>Threats</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">* time of all four co-ordinators all working full-time* seeking funding for future activities* fears and misconceptions of what faithful friends is about* other activities of interest for young people whose free-time is already limited

Conclusions...

High points: each meeting was always attended by some great young people, with real interest and enthusiasm to engage with the activities we had put on, and to put their opinion across when discussing issues.

Also the hospitality at each of the different places of worship we met at – we were given tours at St Johns Church, and at the Ramgharia Gudwara, at the Gudwara the committee gave us an amazing spread of refreshments that we shared together, the Minhaj mosque allowed us to meet whilst their evening prayers were taking place, with Muslim young people in the group flexibly popping out for prayers and re-joining us again. At the Olympic meeting, the Sai Baba group provided a very generous meal.

On the tours of the places of worship as well as in every discussion group we had, the young people asked some really challenging and thoughtful questions, and responded with openness and respect.



Rev Darren shows us St John's Church

A lot of high points, a lot to build on beyond the pilot project, some challenges we faced but that actually once addressed could make the group even more effective.

Even though we often had new young people at each meeting, the young people all mixed well together regardless of the different faith backgrounds.



Challenges:

Access to young people not as good as we thought it would be. Many of the places of worship in Newham seem to be facing the same issue with a lack of young people attending. There were very little youth groups attached to places of worship. Of the youth groups that are operating, we spoke with a number of the leaders, but we were not met with an enthusiastic response.

Possible for two reasons: (1) Youth leaders are finding it hard enough to engage the young people in their own activities, let alone encourage them to do additional things. (2) Some groups, particularly those in Christian evangelical Black African churches, still have a number of concerns with dialogue with other faiths either due to their conviction of conversion, or their fear of others converting their young people.



Lessons learned:

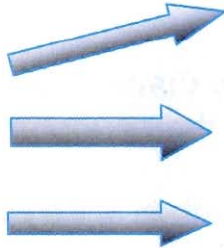
The 'adult' faithful friends put on more introductory training for faith leaders new to the idea of engaging with other faiths e.g. purely from a friendship angle, not conversion etc. Each faith leader could be asked if the faithful friends youth could visit the youth clubs and tell them about the project, inviting them etc.

We at faithful friends are respectful of the concerns of some faith leaders and youth groups, and after the pilot project we aim to undertake activities that will dispel the fears or misunderstandings mentioned. Instead of inviting the young people to an external meeting, in a different place of worship belonging to a faith they do not know about or have concerns about, the next phase of the project will seek to take the Faithful Friends concept to the youth groups themselves.

Next Year...



Go as a group to other groups



Share faithful friends with new Youth groups

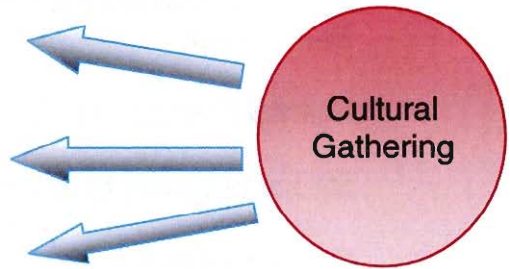
Invite new young people to join us

Build relationships with more places of worship

Invite local groups

Bring a dish to share – 'flavour' of cultures

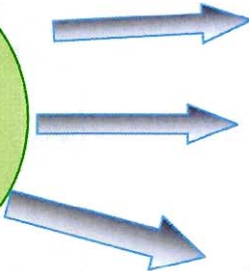
Youth speakers



Cultural Gathering



Share and Compare Scripture



Favourite quotes relevant today

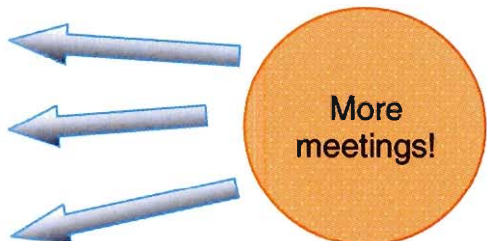
A topic or theme is agreed by all

Each young person comes prepared to the meeting to share

More frequent

At least once a month

At different places of worship



More meetings!

Thank you

We would like to say thank you to the following people for their support:

All the young people involved in the pilot

The project coordinators: Rev Darren McIndoe, Mathan Arulvel, Rafiq Ahmad, Becci Fryatt

Faithful Friends (Adults)

Minhaj al Quran Mosque, Forest Gate

St John's Church, Stratford
The S'ai Baba Community, Manor Park
Emmanuel Parish Church, Forest Gate
Ramgharia Sikh Gurdwara, Forest Gate

Our funders: Genesis Housing Group

Genesis
Community

