



cohesioncounts
building and measuring community cohesion

Bringing communities together through creative arts

Spiral Dance report for Cohesion Counts

**Project: BRINGING COMMUNITIES TOGETHER THROUGH CREATIVE ARTS
(SPIRAL DANCE)**

Project Location: FALINGE

**Organisation: SPIRAL DANCE FOLKWAYS IN PARTNERSHIP WITH M6 YOUTH
THEATRE**

Organisations' key activity: Dance and Drama

**What are the background issues that led to a need for community cohesion
projects?**

Falinge is an area within the Rochdale Borough that gets plenty of attention but this does not always tell the story of the individuals and families that live there.

The word 'deprived' often follows Falinge, Channel 4's Secret Millionaire has visited the area, and there have been articles in local, regional and national Newspapers with the headlines 'Falinge-sicknote capital' (MEN, Dec 08), 'The Shameless Capital of Britain' (Daily Express, Mar 08)

The majority of Lower Falinge is ranked between 18 and 744 (out of 32,482 SOAs in England) indicating that the overall level of deprivation is very high.

(stats and maps, Rochdale statistics and maps website)

The area has also been described as 'fractured' with so many families moving in and out of the area so quickly.

In 2002, the latest year for which data is available, the average weekly household income in Falinge was £300, compared to a national average of £525. Its inhabitants come from a huge variety of backgrounds, too, and an estimated 75 languages are spoken.

(www.insidehousing.co.uk)

Why is the project appropriate for this area and community?

Folkways take's a closer look behind the statistics and the labels attached to an area. The project focuses on the themes of friendship and belonging, and looks at how relationships are formed between different ages and cultures.

Folkways is a project that Spiral Dance has delivered across the Borough of Rochdale, working with diverse communities, discovering stories and sharing them through a variety of art forms. It was important to include Falinge within this, as an area with so much focus and attention.

Working physically and creatively gets people working together, talking and sharing openly.

The project questions were:

I was...I am...I will...

For me, home is...

I wish....

For me, friends are...

For me, free time is...

I need you when...

Questions I have never asked...

For me, family is...

Things I have lost...

Every answer is valued, no answer is wrong. Working with dance, drama, poetry and visual arts gives participants the opportunity to challenge, explore and understand their own and others responses.

What were the project's aims and objectives?

In January 2009 Spiral Dance responded to a commission from the Tenant Services Authority Innovation Good Practice Programme currently being run by the Oldham and Rochdale Pathfinder. This was a great extension to the Rochdale Borough-wide Folkways project.

The commission stated that:

The role of arts and creativity in supporting personal and social issues is well demonstrated within research and UK policy in arts, community renewal, health, culture and economic sectors. Key elements of this IGP project should be:

- *The creation of a positive opportunity for interaction through an arts or drama project which will help to break down barriers between different age, ethnic or social groups.*
- *To be intergenerational but with the main focus on young people.*
- *To be sustainable, in that it should leave something in place when the project ends - **This is***

particularly important.

- *It could be music, drama or arts based.*
- *Ideally it would involve different community groups held together by a common interest*
- *To develop innovative, high impact creative and engaging messages around community cohesion and hate crime.*
- *To raise awareness of issues around community cohesion and hate crime*
- *To show how engaging in drama and creativity can help to change mindsets and break down barriers between different social groups*
- *To be enjoyable and fun – people will need to want to take part*
- *It should engage with a minimum of 15 – 20 participants.*

Spiral Dance responded with Folkways a project that was delivered through a number of phases...

Phase One - August 2009

Taster Workshops - 4 open workshops each with a variety of art forms.

Phase Two – September to December 2009

Choreography and Production - 13 workshops to form an intergenerational performance group working with dance, drama and physical theatre.

Phase Three - December 2009

Performance- Celebration event bringing together all participants involved in the Folkways project from across the Rochdale Borough. Falinge performance group to share new performance work created.

Phase Four - January 2010

Reports and new pathways.

Folkways aims:

- To explore attitudes to difference through values, beliefs and behaviours.
- To understand individuals within the diverse communities that the project involves.
- To assess the effectiveness of the creative process with participants and artists.
- To create new working and community networks, partnerships and relationships.

Who was the project intended to benefit, how were participants recruited and who did benefit in the end?

The project was intended for families, children and young people and older people. The aim of the project was to engage different generations and working together rather than separately understand the community where they live more. The project also aimed to attract different ethnicities.

Although we aimed to work with these participants the participants themselves were able to define themselves, and some participants chose not to provide either age or ethnic information.

Participants were recruited with support from a number of partner organisations, including, Rochdale Boroughwide Housing, Howard Street Children's Nursery, Falinge Park High School, Rochdale Youth Service, Hebron Church. This included fliers and door to door conversations. We launched the Falinge part of the Folkways programme through participatory workshops at The Big Lunch Event in Falinge in July.

The open workshops were attended well for the first two, with low numbers for the second two. At these there was also a good mix of ages and ethnicities. The sustained group from September was attended by children and young people aged 3-18yrs, with some parental involvement.

What actually happened?

The opening workshop was fantastic and a great way to start the project in Falinge. The opening workshop was attended by 40 people between the ages of 0-50yrs, predominantly female, and an even mix of white, Asian or Asian British, and Black or Black British. Numbers throughout the project were extremely varied with commitment and focus being the main challenges we faced to deliver the project.

All the open workshops began with graffiti board activities linked to the main question of the day. Then to bring the groups together a whole group dance would get everyone working together, usually a circle dance or social dance. Participants would then choose from the two main art forms on offer and work for an hour to create something that was then shared at the end. At the Falinge workshops visual arts and dance were a constant at all the workshops with drama and poetry at two workshops.

From September the aim was to start a performance group that would meet weekly with a drama and a dance artists to create a performance piece that would share some of their stories.

We all have a story to tell – some make us laugh, some make us cry, some make us think. This is the story of finding stories. It's the story of You Me and Us. Our everyday stories – not of the rich and famous – stories from the street. (Folkways Programme 09)

The group took a long time to form, so that there were the same people attending each week. There were also many challenging behaviours within the group, which with a short time frame was difficult to manage.

The Falinge Folkways performance group performed *Tell Me A Story* at Rochdale Town Hall on December the 10th.

What went well and what would you do differently?

The creation of a positive opportunity for interaction through an arts or drama project which will help to break down barriers between different age, ethnic or social groups.

All the participants we have worked with either in August at a workshop or at the regular sessions have lots of energy, and enthusiasm for creative activity. We could just put the music on and people of all ages, ethnicities and abilities would start dancing. Every week the post-it note feedback was very positive:

Fun, exciting, liked the hip hop, liked moving, my fav part was dancing, liked being lively, my favourite drama game was- it was you! Enthusiastic, excited, lively, lovely, brilliant, good, crazy- the session was lively and crazy, i enjoyed it, enjoyed learning choreography and performing it, don't want to change anything. Made me feel energetic, both parts of the session were good, i think it's perfect, i enjoyed jumping everywhere, it made me feel very happy and made me more lively, i don't think i would have changed anything.

The open August workshops included people of all ages and particularly families which was great. The challenge with this was to involve everyone as equals, as many of the parents either wanted to chat round the edge, or felt very responsible for the children and young people in the room, not always participating fully themselves. As the workshops were only 2hrs long we didn't move through this as well as we could. The regular group was predominantly young people from the ages 5- 18yrs with one mum.

To be intergenerational with the main focus on young people.

All aspects of the project were intergenerational, with the main regular performance group being predominantly young people. We would have liked more adult involvement in the

performance group.

To be sustainable, in that it should leave something in place when the project ends.

At the start of the project we were aware of other groups that the participants may like to feed into including a youth theatre group and youth dance group. It became clear that there were one or two young people who would benefit from working in a more focused way, however the majority of the group were very un-confident and would probably only attend for a short period of time.

The group are also very used to activity taking place on their estate, or if there are opportunities off the estate they would be taken there. Many of the young people would not make their own way to an activity. A half way evaluation with the artists highlighted that longer, and more sustained work needed to happen with this group, that was not project based to be able to make changes to these attitudes or barriers.

Further funding has been applied for to continue to work with the group and to also train adults, parents to support the development of the group. We are currently awaiting this decision. In order to sustain regular activity Spiral Dance cannot do this alone, and the partnership, network that has started to form between Rochdale Borough Housing and Regeneration would need to continue.

The resources produced as part of this project are going to be used again to sustain the Folkways project - particularly as an education resource for local schools.

It could be music, drama or arts based.

The Folkways project in Falinge included Dance, Drama, Visual Arts and Poetry.

Ideally it would involve different community groups held together by a common Interest.

The participants from Falinge who chose to engage with the project, were joined by an enthusiasm for either one of the art forms, or working creatively. This way of working is not for everyone. The project themes, and questions helped to bring different community groups together and respond in their own way.

To develop innovative, high impact creative and engaging messages around community cohesion and crime.

This project has been described as innovative by many who have involved with it as it has involved artists and participants in high level questioning and thinking through working

creatively. The project has been led by the theme, or questions, and the responses have been amazing. It was led by one art form dance, however offering the variety and choice made the difference.

Participants have engaged with messages around community cohesion by sharing, moving together, having space for opinions with no right or wrong. One final evaluation response from a group member was about how they are now thinking differently about the people they live with, their neighbours, which is great, but I am not sure we got to go as far with this as we would have liked.

The most amazing point of recognition for me that we had achieved our outcomes around community cohesion was when 180 people were dancing together behind me at Rochdale Town Hall - all ages, all cultures, ethnicities, people from across the Rochdale Borough.

It was a fantastic way to bring such a diverse audience together; particularly some of the Falinge residents who might not normally attend arts events etc. I was sat with the Falinge community and there appeared to be strong community feeling amongst an extremely diverse group of residents. (Artists comments)

To raise awareness of issues around community cohesion and crime

Folkways responded to the themes of community cohesion and hate crime by engaging people in a series of questions. These questions would allow people to respond as individuals, learn from others, and generate discussion around beliefs and values about home, friends, family, dreams, memories etc.

What we did achieve working in this way was learning and understanding about difference, and perceptions. The project wasn't prescriptive and did not work with loaded questions around hate crime. The project focused people's attention to what unites them and not about less important surface differences. What we found was the deeper basic needs of people around security, safety, love and relationships.

'story was powerful and beautiful and part of the experience that the participants will remember for a long time. A story of a lonely old woman who had a talent for writing, a thirst for knowledge of the world beyond. This was a story full of love, social interaction and which summed up Folkways as a community cohesion project.' (Artist Comments)

To show how engaging in drama and creativity can help to change mindsets and break down barriers between different social groups

This project has planted seeds, that hopefully in the future we may still be working with group to know what the impact has really been. The questions, themselves joined people in things they were involved with on an everyday basis, regardless of race, religion or culture. Because participants were working physically as well as mentally people could respond differently- for example through drama the participants took on characters of different community members;

'stories was great in terms of fitting in with the theme, having an old lonely lady as the focal character, asking young participants to relate directly to somebody a lot older than them and put themselves in their shoes. Allowing the audience to do the same. This story had humanity, strength and the opportunity for participants to tell their own stories or research their family and ethnic backgrounds to bring their story to the group' (Artist comments)

The dance gave people the chance to physically work together, and not just talk about working together, embody emotions and characters.

To be enjoyable and fun – people will need to want to take part

Every week the feedback from participants was really positive, particularly the social, fun aspects of working with dance and drama. The only feedback where participants wanted to make changes was around managing the behaviour of some participants as they felt this was getting in the way of working together.

The time scale has effected this project and although with many groups we work with it is feasible to form a group and create performance work, the pressure of an event after twelve weeks was too great and myself and the artists involved think that the group didn't have time to reach their full potential.

The venue also did not create a space where the group could focus, there were many distractions, and some of the young people found it difficult to take the project seriously.

The project would not have been as successful as it was without the support of the Priority Area Workers from Rochdale Borougwide Housing and more of a relationship with them needed to be developed before the project as I think we underestimated how essential their role was to support residents to be involved.

It should engage with a minimum of 15 – 20 participants.

- The open workshops in Falinge involved 19 male and 46 female usages of service.

- There were 27 participants from Falinge in total over the 13 weeks of regular workshops.
- 15 participants formed the final performance group fro Falinge.
- There were 23 audience members from Falinge

What else should people know about this project?

This project has been one of the most exciting projects Spiral Dance has co-ordinated with many highs, as well as many challenges. We have learnt a lot about working intergenerationally and combining art forms. It has reinforced our belief that working creatively can make changes to people's lives, behaviours and attitudes. There are still questions as to how this is sustained.

A partnership has formed between the organisations involved in this project and I think this will continue to develop in the future.

The children and young people who have taken part have said at the end of the project;

'This project has made me think about other people and how they live their lives'

'What is want to do when I grow up is be a dancer'

'I think the performance was good because it got people working with each other'

'I liked watching other people dance, it was art - the colours'

The group also did achieve what they set out to do and produced a new piece of work for performance. The group really came together at the event and many performed very confidently, really relishing in the excitement of the occasion.

Though there were obvious problems it is important to reflect the positive and exciting potential of this group in this evaluation. As well as being a genuinely diverse group, they were vibrant, lively and fun with an infectious and raw energy which clearly needs nurturing and supporting appropriately to ensure positive outcomes. Though they lacked focus and were easily distracted they did show the ability to engage really well on occasions. There is clearly genuine friendship and strong support networks within the community crossing the usually perceived barriers of age, race and religion etc. Demand/need for arts activities on Falinge was clearly evidenced and this project should act as a springboard for future and sustainable provision. (Artist Comments)

