



cohesioncounts
building and measuring community cohesion

Breaking down barriers by philosophical discussion

**Contour Housing report
for Cohesion Counts**

Project: BREAKING DOWN BARRIERS BY PHILOSOPHICAL DISCUSSION (PHILOSOPHY FOR COMMUNITIES – P4C)

Project Location: ALT, OLDHAM AND KIRKHOLT, ROCHDALE

Organisation: CONTOUR HOUSING GROUP

Organisations' key activity: REGISTERED SOCIAL LANDLORD

Interview with Sam Cooper, Contour Housing

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

Sam: *“The areas of Alt and Kirkholt are on the outskirts of Oldham and Rochdale respectively. In Alt the housing stock is almost entirely managed by First Choice Homes, with small areas of homeowners and private renting. In 2001 the Census showed that 92% of residents in Alt were from a White British background. Alt sits adjacent to Glodwick, an area, which according to 2001 census statistics is more ethnically mixed, with a largely Pakistani heritage community. The Alt neighbourhood team believed that there has been some recent movement from the Asian communities from Glodwick into Alt. Taking this into account it was decided that P4C could look at a number of emerging issues in the area such as relations between and perceptions of different tenure types, relations between and perceptions of different social backgrounds, considering the emerging different tenure types in the neighbourhood, relations between different age groups, relations between and perceptions of different ethnic groups”*

“Kirkholt is similar in that it also has a mix of local authority stock and right-to-buys. The area has a large number of teenagers living there, and also an older population. 35% are aged 24 and under and 38% are aged over 45 (census 2001). The Kirkholt team felt that this presents issues in terms of intergenerational cohesion. The Project in Kirkholt used P4C to look at the intergenerational issues, especially in relation to relationships between and perceptions of different age groups, perceptions of the different types of properties for different age groups, Relationships between and perceptions of people from different areas of Kirkholt, perceptions of placement of housing for ‘older people’ on the Kirkholt estate”

Why is the project appropriate for these areas?

Sam: *“Through work with partner schools, Contour was first introduced to P4C and from experience working with other communities we believed that we could transfer the model to varied*

community settings. Previous project experience where inter-generational and inter-faith dialogue formed the basis for community problem solving gave us the confidence to pitch this project to these neighbourhood teams”

What were the project’s aims and objectives?

Sam: *“Using Community Philosophy to impact positively on community cohesion by facilitating and encouraging dialogue and bringing people together from different ages and social and ethnic backgrounds in Alt, to impact positively on community cohesion by facilitating dialogue and bringing people together from different ages, property types and areas in Kirkholt. Also, to encourage residents to articulate their views clearly and listen to other points of view, thereby encouraging people to value each other in Alt and Kirkholt, to aid intergenerational understanding by developing relationships between younger and older members of the community in Kirkholt and to encourage residents to get involved with consultation and engagement in Alt and Kirkholt”*

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

Sam: *“This project intended to benefit residents of different ages and backgrounds from Alt and Kirkholt in terms of Community cohesion, personal development and engagement. It was also intended to act as a consultation tool for the neighbourhood teams to build on their own relationships with residents and gather informal information.*

Participants were recruited directly via the area officers and also by a facilitator from Contour Housing who had a stall at an open day at Alt, did a presentation at an over 50s luncheon in Kirkholt and visited a youth club on Kirkholt to recruit participants. Efforts were made to recruit people from different backgrounds, areas of the estates and different tenures. However, this proved extremely difficult to do within the time a budget constraint of project”

What actually happened at the sessions?

Sam: *“P4C uses a structured 10 step methodology for each session. The main focus of the enquiry uses an everyday object such as a news article, a photograph or a short story as the starting point for a discussion. The dialogue is then guided towards one topic which the group democratically vote on pursuing by creating their own open questions and eventually, with thought and interaction the creation of their own conclusions.*

Philosophical enquiry (P4C) is a way of getting people to talk to one and other, exchanging and questioning points of view and building relationships between people. It uses Philosophical questioning techniques to encourage people to look at issues relevant to their life, work and community from a personal point of view, therefore in practice it isn't just sitting down for a chat; the facilitators are persistent in opening, then deepening and personalising, the conversation. Instead of generalisations about "we" or "they", the facilitators probe for personal responses, asking "what do you think?", "what is your experience?"

What went well and what would you do differently?

Sam: *"The project was infused with enthusiasm from all partners and participants that were involved which helped to give it the drive needed to develop an untried concept in these areas of Oldham and Rochdale. From my point of view the most satisfying part of this project was the personal development that was achieved by participants and the idea of taking concepts away and discussing them further at home and in their communities.*

I thought that the video footage we took and used as part of the evaluation was a powerful tool to describe the impacts of the project and in hindsight I would have thought that footage following the philosophy sessions in progress would have added something to this.

Something that perhaps would be beneficial to alter for similar projects would be to consider whether incentivising participation is necessary. An incentive undoubtedly attracted a lot of interest from teenage groups in Kirkholt but the older generations advised us that it was unnecessary. It would have been interesting to discover whether the teenagers would have continued to attend after the funding for this had ended.

One suggestion for adding further value to this project would have been to link in with parents from a nearby primary school in Oldham (where P4C is practiced). Due to time constraints this was not feasible but would have been an interesting addition to what was in my opinion a great success"

What else would you like people to know about this project?

Sam: *"Please read more about the project at www.whatifphilosophers.co.uk and read the community book of quotes at www.issuu.com/samwellcooper/docs/wevebeenthinking"*