Case Study: New Skills and Working Practices for Cohesion Delivery, Slough (Sept 2022)

Detail of the Activity

This case study provides insight into how Breaking Boundaries has facilitated changed working approaches in Slough for staff involved in the programme and their engagement with others enabling a more focussed approach on cohesion in the local authority and its partners.

Activity Development and Delivery

Slough had success through the work of the Coordinator and Activator to develop new partnerships at first between the local authority (as host for the programme) and project partners, but then across the local authority to join groups together. Although having a focus on cohesion through the local Cohesion team, there had always been challenges in developing concerted focussed action around it. This was particularly the case between the sports/health and cohesion teams in the local authority.

How Breaking Boundaries Helped

The impetus provided by the programme facilitated new connections to be made across the local authority between different teams encouraging them to connect. This was because Breaking Boundaries offered a vehicle through which the developing cohesion strategy could be delivered:

"*It was an opportunity, we were in a position where we were developing a cohesion strategy so the project fitted nicely in with the direction of the local authority…[on cohesion]. We were also a frontline team working with communities and neighbourhoods and this fitted really well into our workstreams. We were really excited about using sport in community cohesion.*" (**Community Coordinator, Slough**)

In 2018, conversations facilitated by development of the programme enabled the Breaking Boundaries project to start working with the Youth Offending Team (YOT). These discussions focussed on how the young people working with the team could be more involved in shaping the physical activity offer in the local authority area.

Over two years, relationships were developed through conversations around local cohesion issues and work with the young people facilitated through over 100 volunteer hours from members of the Youth-Led Change Team who led the design of several exercise programmes.

What Happened – Impacts on Cohesion

The developments and partnership working led by the Youth-Led Change Team created a seated exercise offer, an older people exercise tour and a teenage Sport and Financial literacy offer. Alongside this, some young people also volunteered to support a Disability Multi-Sports offer and a Polybat offer.

Fundamentally, the programme has encouraged Breaking Boundaries staff to think differently about their working approach and the types of partners they work with. They have been enabled to look

outside contacts into other fields that are not normally linked to physical activity but do have an interest and role in developing and improving community cohesion.

> *"The more we spoke to communities, the more we were able to shape the programme. We also changed significantly…[in our working approach]. We moved in a completely different direction in the way the council operated. That supported some of the engagement in BB and communicating with residents…[to collect intelligence about the local cohesion issues they were facing]"* (**Community Coordinator, Slough**)

These areas of development and activity have resulted in the following key outcomes:

- **Improved Partnership Working:** The Community Co-ordinator is clear that the relationship that has been developed with the YOT is one of the best outcomes from the programme in Slough. They have overcome historically poor links with other teams across the local authority and built stronger links.

  These have supported the development of a new activity offer that has supported work with key target communities including newly emerging groups like the Bangladeshi community; tackling distrust between different Asian groups, and facilitating work with the Roma community. This has made it easier

  Like other city areas, they note that the initial establishment of contact to start the partnership building process was best facilitated by the face-to-face contact encouraged by Breaking Boundaries.

- **Improved skills around social cohesion work** – for the Community Coordinator the experience through Breaking Boundaries enabled them to have improved skills in engaging with different partners and those they work with to really understand why communities did and didn't get on with each other. This then highlighted key barriers to social connectedness and addressing the parallel lives in local areas :

- However, it also highlights the need to maintain regular contact with organisations over the long term (this work took over two years before it gained a proper foothold, as the project lead notes:

> *"We had some really good connectors and through the hard work and constant conversations and social media and attending things, it [Breaking Boundaries] meant more to people. Some of the relationships we have now with the groups we wouldn't have had to the extent we have them without BB. Our community engagement was shallow before and groups are a small part of that engagement tool. Now being invited to dinners and for coffee, it puts us in good stead. We work more with the groups now and they have a really good cohort we can engage.."* (**Project Lead, Slough**)

> "Internally and externally, we were able to connect with a wide range of diverse groups. We were able to provide a wide range of opportunities. It's the YOT in particular as it was such a hard thing to set up. We put people in a room who wouldn't have been there otherwise. Now it's a good partnership because we set up relationships with other people. The YOT lead, is [now] working with loads of our groups now and I am proud of that." (**Community Coordinator, Slough**)

The Coordinator and Line Manager identified that they improved their understanding of the challenges their dleivery partners faced and had built up over time. They highlighted how they

Their working approach has changed and that they had better skills in engaging partners outside the sports sector.

- **Increased community participation and sense of belonging** – the activities that have resulted from this work have been better targeted at groups because of the expertise the community partners bring to set up. This has been noted by participants who identified how they were more engaged in activities in their communities and had a a sense of belonging to something bigger than their immediate friendship/peer groups:

"I get to meet different people from different backgrounds and cultures and although I know quite a lot about that anyway it's just nice to learn something new every single day and learn different ways of communicating" **(Participant, Slough)**

"it was a nice way to get out with the community and have time out and meet new people." **(Participant, Slough)**

The Future
A new disability group has been established and work with the YOT continues and both are linked in with other community groups to facilitate further working. The capability of different partners has been extended to engage with others so they should have the ability to develop new partnerships independently in the future:

"*They all have a little better understanding on how they open up their offer and some of their events are incredible and if they opened up a little more, there is more opportunity.*" (**Project Lead, Slough**)

Top Tips for Effective Delivery
- **Persistence is key, such change can often take months and even years to establish**, consistent messaging is also important so that understanding of programme focus is maintained .

- **Proactive and ongoing engagement on a one to one basis keeps partners engaged.** This helps to build programme understanding and maintains connection even whilst activity delivery may not be ongoing. It

can also be an important source of local intelligence on emerging cohesion issues that can facilitate new project/delivery development.

- **Use the expertise of community groups to identify engagement and recruitment approaches** they have the trusted links that others may take much longer to establish.