

BREAKING BOUNDARIES

Case Study: Using Local Cohesion Expertise The Feast (July 2022), Birmingham

Detail of the Activity

The Feast began operating in Birmingham in 2000, and work to bring together teenagers from different faiths and cultures to build friendships, explore faith and change lives. They have developed expertise in promoting cohesion between young people of different faiths and cultures in their communities. Through a range of interactive approaches with small groups of young people (up to a maximum of 20) using good youth work practice focussed on young people's they seek to bring opportunities to those young people

to review and identify ways in which local cohesion might be improved. The Feast also work in Bradford, Tower Hamlets, and Luton.

This case study highlights the learning identified from how they supported a City Leadership Forum and its partnership development work in Birmingham by training participant organisations in delivery approaches around cohesion drawn from their own expertise.

Activity Development and Delivery

The Feast were engaged in the early years of the Breaking Boundaries programme in Birmingham as a delivery partner. Initial discussions were focussed on how they could help directly delivering some of the Breaking Boundaries sessions. In late 2021 as plans for the City Leadership Forums were formed conversations between The Feast staff and the Community Coordinator at the time highlighted how The Feast could contribute in a different way by providing expert input around approaching cohesion issues with young people to upskill other partners to help them include this in future activities run by the programme.

How Breaking Boundaries Helped

The Feast staff had always felt that they could offer some training support but hadn't been sure how this could happen in the early project development work they were involved in. The slight change in focus around developing the City Leadership Forum in Birmingham to focus on ways of bringing and joining different delivery partners together opened up that opportunity. The Feast staff then discussed with the Coordinator at the time how this input could be delivered and an education session was agreed.

Having a different approach to the Forum where participant organisations were provided with training around cohesion and guidelines for dialogue to help facilitate conversations with young people throughout project delivery about cohesion meant the

activity built in cohesion at the earliest stages of activity planning. The Coordinator Jill from Feast (cohesion expert) delivered the session. It provided insight in the way delivery staff could facilitate conversations between young people from different backgrounds and reflect on conversations that could lead to positive outcomes in the future. As the staff member from The Feast highlighted:

"It's about having to tools to do it. It's almost like hearsay for me...with limited input it could have had a real impact...[for the other delivery partners]. We [The Feast] never want to do something and leave, it's the legacy, it's how have we continued the work we do...by sharing our expertise like this."

Further support from The Feast was arranged so that delivery partners could be provided with resources that could help them facilitate and initiate these kinds of conversations in the future. They were keen to stress the

importance of training on this issue, and that all staff involved must be equipped to be able to confidently support constructive dialogue during sessions.

What Happened – Impacts on Cohesion

The contribution from The Feast contributed to cohesion delivery in two specific ways:

- **Improved skills around social cohesion work** – this was key area of planned development sought from including this in the City Leadership Forum.

The Feast was able to provide the specialist advice within a sport and activity context, and how in practice to bridge the gap between sport as an activity to sport as a tool. The Feast staff member summarised this as:

“getting to know others as friends not just as opponents” (Project Lead, Birmingham).

The local Coordinator identified that they improved their understanding of the challenges in dealing with the community groups and had been given good insights in how to move forward on the local cohesion agenda. Participant organisations spoke in the session how it had given them more confidence to build the cohesion focus into their activities and welcomed this.

They also highlighted how through the session able to reflect on conversations that they had been involved in and how these could be improved in future. Being locally-based, the Feast were able to give context and local specific insights, including recommendations on suitable venues, locations and activities. For example, they recommended that activities always be run in a way that can be replicated by young people afterwards without needing to buy specific equipment or hire a certain venue and recommended local parks that were suitable for delivery in a public setting.

- **Improved Partnership Working:** The approach brought a different dimension to the Forum which enabled partnership connections to be made between different organisation because through the training they were able to identify organisations that were in a similar position to themselves making partnering easier. It also helped them to identify ways in which future activities could be run together so that they could support young people to take them on themselves.



The Future

The Birmingham Breaking Boundaries team are continuing to work with The Feast to

Top Tips for Effective Delivery

- **Partnership meetings can focus on skill development as well as activity planning**, cohesion work can be challenging for many and short training and development inputs can be really valued. The offer of training on top of networking opportunities could also help persuade some more reticent organisations to attend.
- **Using local community experts as training deliverers at local partnership events grounds delivery development around local issues.** This enables training to be tailored to help partners deal with local context and issues in a better way meaning their cohesion approach can be better focussed.
- **Delivery should focus on identifying activities and ways of working that can easily be replicated in other settings by the community group staff that will be leading the future delivery, especially young people.** This helps to create activities that are less reliant upon venue availability or need very specific kit and equipment.

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