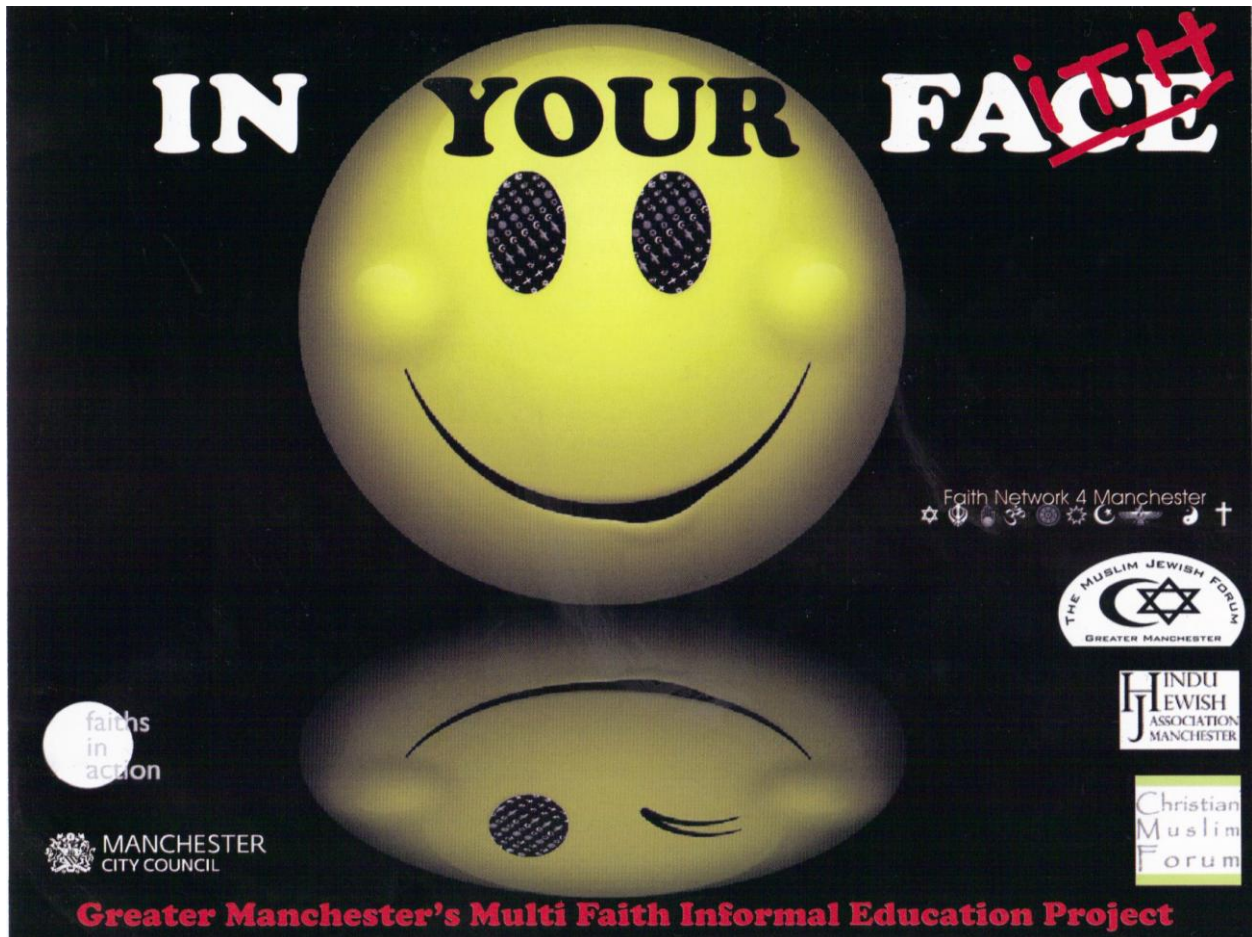


Faith Network 4 Manchester



INTERFAITH PROJECT



&

MONTHLY FAITH DIALOGUE EVENTS

APRIL 2011

www.fn4m.org

This report gives an overview of the Interfaith Project funded by Manchester City Council and delivered by Faith Network 4 Manchester during 2010/11.

CONTENTS

Background

Monthly Faith Dialogue Events

In Your Faith Sessions

The 'In Your Faith' Team

The Experience

Participants' Feedback & Evaluation

Future Development

Background of FN4M Activities

Faith Network 4 Manchester (FN4M) is Manchester's inter-faith and multi-faith network and has been part of the Community Network 4 Manchester. Our aims are to:

- Be the forum for members of all faith communities across Manchester to meet and communicate together to consider the issues raised in local decision making and strategic planning
- Enable the voice of faith communities to influence all stages of local decision making and strategic planning
- Ensure the ethical and environmental dimensions are always considered at all levels of local decision making and strategic planning
- Deliver educational tools and opportunities appropriate to each generation to challenge prejudice and promote active, engaged and informed citizenship
- To ensure that faith groups are supported in the delivery of community and social activity.

FN4M has been working with other partners since 2004 to promote the voice of faith communities in decisions affecting the quality of life of all who live in Manchester. Our members are from different faiths and none who work together across the spectrum of human diversity to promote the well-being of all.

We host events that explore issues on which some people of faith hold passionate views; organise bi-annual conferences around aspects of faith in areas such as Health, the Environment, Policing & Crime, Arts & Culture, Housing & Homelessness and engage with Politicians, Probation Services, Police, Health Services and Local Authorities (mainly Manchester City Council). We produce a bi-annual newsletter "Faith in Manchester".

Highlights of our journey together include:

"Gambling with Our Future" – a conference that explored the wisdom of using a 'super-casino' as the main focus of regenerating the economy of East Manchester. It offered an alternative plan informed by people of all backgrounds across the city that was rooted in diversity and could offer business, family, leisure, artistic, learning, retail and culinary facilities.

"Standing Together Against Violence" – an event that arose out of our work with gang members to change the negative gang culture that plagued our communities. It celebrated the miracle of Sophie Finucane, a girl who recovered after being shot in the head at close range. This in turn led to the FN4M dinner conference: "My Gang = My Family"; the drama "Street Wise" that our members helped direct; our ongoing relationship with Peace Week, CARISMA, Mother's Against Violence, the Sophie

Lancaster Foundation and others working to support young people to develop alternative models of belonging. Members of our youth arm, Faith Youth Manchester, assisted us when FN4M was asked to help Greater Manchester Police Authority set up a Youth Independent Advisory Group and some of them were involved, along with Love Music Hate Racism, in developing Queerstianity to combat hate messages spouted in the name of religion. The group became the biggest youth led “gang” in Manchester. Its activities promoted peace and raised funds for such causes as Amnesty International and the Sophie Lancaster Foundation through gigs put on by members.

Queerstianity earned a homo-hero award for its role tackling homophobia and the honour of leading Pride 2010 with Sir Ian McKellen. That same year, it received a Diana Award and its six young founders were awarded the Diana Certificate of Excellence.

Faith Youth Manchester has also run several inter-faith events titled ‘Co-exist’. These have successfully brought together young people from many faiths to explore what faith means to them, find out about the faith of their peers and build respect for each other.

Members of our steering group are active in our wider partnership networks as advisors to Greater Manchester Police on issues of community cohesion; consultants in health and education, or sit on other faith/interfaith and community forums such as the Muslim Jewish Forum of Greater Manchester and Community Network for Manchester.

One of our ongoing projects, Growing Faith in Community, works with local volunteers, city wide faith groups and offenders nurturing a large flock of chickens, ducks and geese that lay eggs to accompany a wide range of fruit and vegetables we grow to provide fresh food for homeless and other vulnerable people across the city.

With this range of experience of working to promote dialogue instead of argument, respect instead of suspicion and cooperation instead of rivalry, and our grasp of the challenges facing young people growing up in Britain today, FN4M were well placed to develop and deliver an Interfaith Project consisting of Monthly Faith Dialogue events and In Your Faith sessions in schools and youth groups.

Monthly Faith Dialogue (MFD) Events

MFD events were forums for discussing some of the current 'hot' issues of interest within faith communities include far right extremism, gender, equality, stop & search, homosexuality (LGBT), Islamophobia and anti-Semitism. Each MFD event has a particular topic/issue for discussion and participants are encouraged to share their personal views whilst respecting the views of others. The facilitator ensures extremist views are challenged.

Over the course of the project we have looked at the following topics:

October 2010: 70 Righteous Muslims who saved Jews in WWII
November: Inter-faith week 'Human Rights: A Hindu Jewish Perspective'
December: Faith Says...About Culture
January 2011: Faith Says...About Community Cohesion
February: Faith Says...About Sexuality
March: Faith Says...About Food

- The Righteous Muslims event was held at the Manchester Jewish Museum and attended by over 80 people including the Lord Mayor and several local councillors. It was a fascinating event facilitated by 2 authors who presented findings of their research on the topic. There was a warm feeling in the room acknowledging that people of faith can be supportive of people of an entirely different faith.
- The Human Rights event took place in Inter Faith Week and was a Seminar led by the Hindu Jewish Association. It was attended by over 50 people and had both academic and a legal practitioner from the Hindu and Jewish faiths leading the dialogue. There was lively discussion and an improved understanding of the basis of human rights within faiths and the positive contribution to Human Rights they make in practice.
- The Culture event was on literature, music & dance, and art held at the Manchester Cathedral. Different faith perspectives were presented looking at history and current state of affairs. There was consensus that faith communities can use literature, arts and music to reach out to young people and challenge negative youth culture.
- We were pleased to have an input to our Community Cohesion event by the Social Inclusion Officer (Race) on behalf of Manchester City Council. Participants were pleased to learn about the City Council's cohesion agenda and hope for more future engagements.
- The Sexuality event was well attended and brokered some partnership working between individuals who had met for the first time. Although a controversial issue within faith communities, the discussion was honest, healthy and constructive. We

were pleased to have the Lesbian and Gay Foundation's help in putting on the event.

- The Food dialogue event discussed Halal, Kosher, Fair Trade and sustainability with regard to food and drink. Whilst not well attended, we still had a positive discussion with enthusiasm for further events looking at food from different religions.
- We had a target of 90% of those attending inter-faith events reporting satisfaction and that it met their needs. Overall, 94% reported at least satisfaction and 92% that it met their needs.

Although participants have been made aware of no available future funding, there are suggested future topics of interest including disability, refugee & asylum, and giving to charity.

In Your Faith (IYF) Sessions

IYF sessions involve raising awareness about different faiths and discussions that are aimed at disavowing myths and challenging stereotypes, which many young people believe as fact. Trained presenters went into schools and youth projects to outline the basics of the major faiths while showing that people of different faiths can work together. Each session had 2 presenters from different faiths delivering their presentation.

With funding secured to run till end of March 2011, a team was developed after a recruitment drive and induction workshop. A card game was produced that helped young people explore different faiths side by side, in addition to a quiz and PowerPoint presentation. Other approaches were explored to meet the varied needs of the schools and youth groups.

The project proved an exciting journey for all involved and deepened team relationships as much as it opened up avenues of understanding amongst participating young people.

In Your Faith Team

There were a number of presenters who delivered the IYF sessions in high schools and colleges.

Christian:

Rev. Charles Kwaku-Odoi (Project Officer)
Rev. David Gray (Coordinator)
Daniel Atkins

Jewish:

Ruth Sayada (Coordinator)
Jonny Wineberg (Advisor)
Rabbi Warren Elf (Advisor)

Sikh:

Roop Singh
Bobby Singh

Muslim:

Shaff Ajab (Coordinator)
Khalil Zeria
Ben Ahmed

Hindu:

Dr Poonam Kakkar (Advisor)
Mayank Banwari

Buddhist:

Clive Pyott (Advisor)

The Experience

High Schools across Manchester were a prime target, as Manchester City Council was funding us to reach as many of its own schools as possible. With a recent change of government and subsequent budget cuts, we found that schools were often focussed on pressing internal issues and our initial raft of emails got a poor response. Each school was telephoned. People we spoke with said they would have to consult and get back to us, but sadly few did so.

With the addition of Ruth Sayada, herself a teacher, to the team, we began to gain insights as to why we were getting such a low take up and with perseverance from all members, particularly Shaff, Ruth and Charles, school breakthroughs started to happen. Meanwhile, David began to look to Faith and Forces related organisations for bookings. In due course a letter was sent out to every head and as news spread by word of mouth of earlier presentations, things began to open up and though we didn't reach all the schools, we were able to offer participating schools a service that reached more of their students than would otherwise have been possible.

Schools contacted included:

- Abraham Moss High School
- Burnage Media Arts College
- Cedar Mount High School
- Chorlton High School
- King David's High School
- Loreto High School
- Manchester College
- Nell Lane
- Newall Green High School
- Our Lady's RC High School
- Parrs Wood High School
- St. Matthew's RC High School
- St. Paul's Catholic High School
- St. Peter's RC High School
- The Barlow RC High School and Specialist Science College
- Trinity Church of England High School
- Whalley Range High School
- Wright Robinson Specialist College

IYF sessions were delivered in the following Schools and Youth Projects:

Schools & Colleges

- Abraham Moss High School
- Burnage Media Arts College
- Newall Green High School
- St. Paul's Catholic High School
- Wright Robinson Specialist College
- Manchester Islamic High School for Girls
- Manchester College, Simon Sheena Campus

Youth Projects

- Failsworth Air Training Corps
- St. James Church Lads & Church Girls Brigade, Gorton

In each case, our members negotiated the most appropriate combination of faith practitioners to present according to factors such as the faith backgrounds of students, religious education studies on the school curriculum and areas where young people expressed a particular interest. Some teachers were keen to address negative media myths arising out of current national and global circumstances, and combinations involving the three Abrahamic faiths were popular followed by Sikhism and Hinduism.

Feedback & Evaluation

Evaluation forms (statistics below) completed by participants showed an overall positive experience. IYF sessions were not platforms for presenters to proselytise or compete, but to promote a better understanding of the faiths and, while highlighting difference demonstrate common factors such as the Golden Rule.

Some young people expressed an interest in deepening their own faith practice. One student, for example, asked to be put in touch with his local church to explore baptism, another wished to know where he could learn more about Islam. In one of the youth groups, two young people said they had enjoyed the presentations on the Abrahamic Faiths and would now like to know more about Hinduism as they had Hindu friends and wanted to know more about their faith practice. In consultation with their adult leaders, a decision was reached to invite the Hindu friends to come and address the group personally, with support from FN4M.

One teacher said she felt a distinct reduction in tension among students after they shared a session in which the two faiths they followed were presented side by side in a deeply respectful manner.

Performance against impact and success targets:

- We had a target of 85% of those attending sessions reporting an increase in knowledge or awareness. Whilst over 99% reported some increase, our measure was based on a score of 6+ out of 10. In the end 84% of all participants reported a score of 6 or more. This is still an extremely positive result.
- We had a target of 95% of those attending sessions reporting a positive attitude to other faiths. Again, we set our measure based on a score of 6+ out of 10. What we had not anticipated was the very low starting point of positivity for those in schools. Our results show that:

	+ve attitude before session	+ve attitude after session
Monthly Faith Dialogues	94.9%	98.7%
In Your Faith (Young People Sessions)	55.8%	85.0%
TOTAL	61.9%	87.15%

This is still, we believe, a remarkable result. Our best evidence of success is that two-thirds of those not stating a positive attitude to other faiths (4 or less out of 10) before sessions did so (6+ out of 10) after sessions. Moreover, for the young people, the average rating of positive attitude to other faiths rose from 5.59 before sessions to 7.62 after sessions - a rise of over 2 points in a 10 point scale – which we believe is quite remarkable.

- We had a target of 10% of those attending sessions indicating that they would want to do more to develop better inter-faith or inter-community relations and giving their contact details for this purpose. 10.2% of young people and 62.9% of adults did so. Overall, this represents 18.6%.

Future Development

In view of the success of the project and the overwhelming response by schools, FN4M hopes to continue with the project and therefore looking for grants to deliver more IYF sessions and run MFD events. However, in the interim there is a charge of £25 per hour per presenter for IYF sessions.

We are also developing 'Faith-full Storytelling' for primary schools at a similar cost.