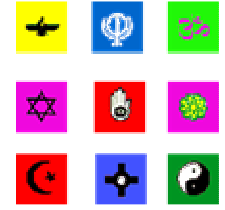


FAITHS TOGETHER IN CROYDON



FAITH IN OUR FUTURE

A REPORT OF THE YOUTH EVENT

BRAITHWAITE HALL

6.00-8.30pm

20th October 2008

Faiths Together in Croydon Youth Event; 20 October 2008.

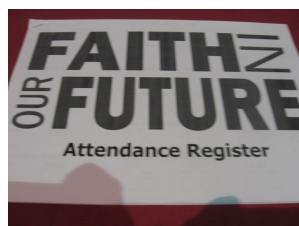
Faith in Our Future

Faiths Together in Croydon has been in existence since 2003 and is an interfaith group representing all the faith communities in Croydon. The steering group has developed a work plan, to be updated annually, which includes in its aims and objectives:

- Improved inter-faith dialogue in Croydon
- Inter-faith events
- A coordinated voice for people of faith in local and national decision making
- Increased opportunities for people of faith to work together and with others to improve Croydon for Croydon people

As part of Faiths Together in Croydon's commitment to hold a series of faith events, it was decided to hold an event specifically for young people. The aims and intended outcomes for this meeting were to;

- To encourage young people to engage dialogue with young people from other faith communities and with young people who do not follow a particular faith
- To explore solutions to challenges young people face and what faith communities can do to address them
- To contribute to increased inter-generational work in the borough
- To explore ideas for the local faith communities and the inter-faith forum to take forward and either deliver bespoke projects and/or advocate for young people via the relevant channels e.g. Local Strategic partnership, Equalities and Cohesion Partnership, Safer Croydon partnership etc.



PLANNING

The event was organised by Penny Smith-Orr from Faiths Together in Croydon, Nicole Beckford from CVA and Karen Michalias from Croydon xpress (seen here with Frederick) and David Dalgleish from Croydon Council.



In the planning stage David and Penny made contact with various youth groups from the faith communities and David went to interview three of these groups. The interviews were in order to find out what the young people would like to talk about at the event and some of their initial feelings about these subjects. As a result of these contacts the four areas of discussion were chosen which were;

- **Interfaith Issues,**
- **Youth crime and safety,**
- **Croydon of the future, a vision**
- **Cohesion.**

It was decided that the four issues would be introduced by young people and therefore we contacted the UK Youth Parliament to get speakers. These were David Battersby, Thomas Sampson and Vicky Sharp all Croydon Representatives, UK Youth Parliament and Yeni Adefioye & Vinella Gregory who volunteered from Haling Manor School.



It was also decided that the event would be organised in workshop sessions so that all would be able to speak about every topic. This would be arranged by giving out different coloured raffle tickets on registration which would relate to the different groups.

In order to make this a fun event we also agreed to have an open mic session at the start and finish, to provide pizza, fruit and drinks and that there would be three prizes connected to the raffle tickets. The prizes were provided by Croydon Xpress and were cinema tickets and shop vouchers. It was also decided to give a small gift to the young presenters and helpers on the evening.

The event was advertised by flier to the secondary schools and in the Croydon Advertiser and was advertised on Croydon Premier Christian radio on the Saturday before the event.

The presenters were briefed with a series of ideas and questions to pose to the audience in a five minute introduction session which was compered by David. See appendix 1.



THE EVENT

Unfortunately the only thing we could not legislate for was the weather and for the first time in weeks it poured with rain on the afternoon and evening of the event which was definitely a reason for the smaller number of participants than we had hoped for.

However a number of the adult members of Faiths Together and from CVA came to the first part of the evening and thirty five young people turned up to take part in the debates.

At the registration area there was a 'graffiti wall' for people to put their wishes for the future on to. A film was made of the whole event with some of the young people being interviewed individually on their views on interfaith issues.



The event started with some an introduction about Faiths Together and its aims and each of the young presenters introducing their particular issue. In view of the smaller number of participants it was decided that people could choose an area to go to discuss one of the issues rather than moving round all four. The majority of people went to the youth crime and safety area.

The outcomes of the discussions can be seen in appendix 2.

The event finished with the refreshments and an open mic session and general discussions among the participants about the issues raised by the topics.



EVALUATION

The venue was a good choice and there were sufficient refreshments to satisfy the participants.

Less people came than were hoped for due to the bad weather.

The idea of having information sheets round the walls about the different faiths caused a few problems and should have been thought through better.

The outcomes of the discussions were interesting and now need to be disseminated to different agencies e.g. the Council, the police, faith communities and the steering group of Faiths Together in Croydon.

See appendix 3 for the result of the evaluation sheets filled in on the evening.

Appendix 1. Introductions to Topics

Interfaith Issues

- Do you feel you know anything about the faith practices of other faith groups?
Do you learn about other faiths in school?
Are you given enough information about faiths other than your own?
Do you think it is important to know and understand what other people's beliefs are?
Should people be encouraged to find out about each other's beliefs?
- Do you know that in Croydon you are allowed a day off school for a religious festival? Have you had any trouble from your school over taking time off to worship?
- Are there areas of Croydon where you as a person of faith feel you cannot go or feel unsafe?
Why? What do you think could be done about this?
Are there enough restaurants/ places that cater for your particular food laws?
- Do you find it difficult to admit to friends (who do not have a faith) that you follow a set of rules or worship in a particular way? What could be done to help people respect these beliefs?
- Would you be interested in working on a project with people of other faiths? What sort of project would that be?

Long-term vision

Relevant points could include:

The plans are currently under-way to set out a vision for the long term future

The recent publicity about Croydon getting city status

What **you** would change / keep about Croydon in the next 30 years

How you will be part of the discussion groups so you want people to come up with some really great ideas

Discussion

Welcome everyone

Explain that your discussion group is about a long-term vision for Croydon (long term means different things to different people. In this case we mean about 30 years).

Perhaps break the ice by asking if anyone thinks they will still be in Croydon in 30 years?

Ask them to think ahead 30 years and then say what:

They think Croydon would look like (buildings, people, green spaces, transport)

They would keep the same about Croydon Town Centre

They would change / get rid of

When you have covered this for 10 minutes move on to asking how they would change the areas where they live (if the people who speak about this issue do not say, ask where they live)

Ask them how they think services for young people should change

Ask what role faith communities can play in bringing about any of these changes:

Individually

Together (inter-faith)

Encourage them to write their ideas down on the suggestion wall

Cohesion

Speech

Ask how many people know what cohesion is

Give a definition (see below)

Perhaps give an anecdote about how you have seen people acting in way which shows either a strong or poor sense of community (helping / not helping people who are in need etc.)

Say how you feel Croydon could be more united and why (explain what you think the benefits are of a united community)

Say how you would achieve this

Discussion

Welcome everyone

Explain that your discussion group is about cohesion.

Perhaps start by asking if anyone can remember what you cohesion was?

Cohesion is about building a more united community.

In order to build a united community you have to heal some of the divisions.

Ask in which ways they feel that the community is divided.

If you need to suggest ways they could include:

Faith
Race / culture / ethnicity
Age
Area
Gangs

Ask how you can address some of these divisions i.e. how would you bring different faith communities together, or how do you address the gangs situation, or how you could tackle racism and other forms of prejudice

For all suggestions ask:

What they would do, how would they carry it out, and who they think should do it.

Ask what role faith communities can play:

Individually
Together (inter-faith)

Encourage them to write their ideas down on the suggestion wall

Youth Crime & Safety Concerns raised over plans to merge schools

It has been said that there are plans to merge Haling Manor with Westwood Secondary School.

Croydon council believe that this would be a great move for the two schools in a bid to tackle falling pupil numbers, as this integration is hoped to produce improved Ofsted reports and in the long run benefit the pupils.

But we wonder, with all the great outcomes they are expecting, have they really considered the well-being of young people, as this move will also involve the merge of gangs?

A report has revealed that one in five schools thinks it has a problem with 'gang culture'. Even though evidence for this is rare, pupils carrying knives were reported in one out of four schools.

Students who attend Haling Manor High School & Westwood Secondary School know that there is rivalry between the schools.

We believe that this merge will result in lots of contention and fighting as evidence shows from previous school merges. An example of this would be the recent merge of Stanley Technical High School and Harris Academy when they became Harris Academy South Norwood in November 2007. This decision will inadvertently merge both gangs, which could possibly also lead to severe consequences such as the increase of youth crime in and around Croydon.

APPENDIX 2. Results of the Discussions

Interfaith discussion notes

Media gives stereotypes of people that need to be broken down.
People are people and some have a faith or belief
All religions have very similar laws and many similar beliefs.
Need to work on the similarities and not the differences.
'what we agree on is the important thing'

Set up some interfaith forums for education/discussion about each other's faiths.

A group of interfaith young people, maybe the youth parliament members or a youth SACRE could go to schools and share ideas on interfaith.

As well as working with young people of faith, work is needed to talk to young people of faith
Young people going into old peoples homes

A day in Croydon which celebrates the many faith groups we have in our community.
A celebration, perhaps out doors or in the Fairfield halls which all faiths would take part in.
'Love Croydon' to be more interfaith and not just from a Christian perspective.

Vision for the Future of Croydon

- Young people in charge of the activities in youth centres
- Different community groups using the same space- intergenerational space.
- Youth led projects- ensure wide range of young people involved in doing this
- Raise awareness /accessibility of services more appealing buildings
- Better advertising of events
- Concerts
- Social activities without a theme bringing everyone together

Cohesion Discussion

- Schools to acknowledge the problem of bullying
- Gender; enforce equal opportunities legislation, equal pay act
- Different interests; encourage less main stream sports, don't gender stereotype sports
- Race; awareness raising – breaking down barriers
- Intergenerational work- increase understanding
- Post code wars; make young people in gangs aware of support available to them to discuss their situation
- Cultural/ racial divides; unify people with something bigger to identify with
- Promote positive views of young people not the usual stereo type

Youth Crime and Safety Discussion Notes

- Put on events that encourage young people to attend and then tell them how faith can enhance their life.
- Tell gang members about positive religious testimonies to make them see and understand God is real and what he has done in their life, he can also do for them.
- Faith organisations need to use the media to promote positive faith organisations / role models.
- Leaving a gang is extremely hard thing to do; Croydon faith organisations should help gang members in this by working with them on realistic gang exit strategies.
- All religions believe in consequences / karma / seeds; what you receive in life is linked to what you give out - This needs to be made aware to young people/gang members.
- My faith helps me to be a better person as it gives me purpose and direction, this needs to be told to gang members because secretly this is what their looking for.
- Gang members aren't fearful or respectful and I think a faith/religion would help to install this into them.
- My faith gives me a foundation, a lot of young people don't know who they are and if they could identify with a faith, it will help them realise that they don't need to join a gang because God is in control of their life.
- Faith leaders need to be on the streets like street pastor talking to young people about Godly values.
- Faith gives people a purpose and hope, young people are looking for this and if they don't find it in a religion they will find it when becoming a gang member.
- My faith helps me to respect myself and others; because I live my life by the bible I am learning and trying to do the right thing.
- Gang members need to fear God & understand that he is real.
- Faith organisations need to have more of a presence with young people. They need to go to Youth Centres, schools & college and tell young people how faith can benefit their lives.