PREJUDICE & US

How do we bridge community divides?
Views from West London

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Protection Approaches works to improve the protection of people from identity-based violence.

Through its Research & Policy and Learning & Outreach programmes, Protection Approaches seeks to strengthen UK understanding of and commitment to prediction, prevention and protection approaches to identity-based violence through research-led policy engagement and education outreach.

Protection Approaches was established to fill a gap in the UK's third sector, where attention on the specific threats posed by mass atrocities had been lagging behind civil society endeavours elsewhere. Protection Approaches is the only organisation in the United Kingdom that works to address the diverse challenges of identity-based violence, from hate crime to violent extremism and genocide.

Summary

In 2016-17 our Hammersmith based pilot project 'Prejudice and Us' uncovered stories of prejudice affecting the lives of young people in London today. We were shocked by the extent to which these experiences had contributed to a normalisation of prejudice among many young people from traditionally marginalised socio-economic, ethnic, religious and cultural groups. This normalisation of prejudice has serious and negative impacts upon their sense of belonging to a wider community and their aspirations for the future.

In response to the findings of the pilot we returned to Hammersmith in late 2017 and early 2018 to hold workshops, interviews and on-the-street conversations with hundreds of people from all corners of the community to ask the question "what can we do to bridge these divides?"

This report presents the solutions put forward by the local residents and members of the Hammersmith community. They can be split into three themes:

1. Creating opportunities for people from different backgrounds to come together for meaningful interactions - interactions where people go beyond surface level conversation to discuss shared interests, hopes, concerns or difficulties

2. Empowering people from marginalised communities to become more involved in their local democratic processes - supporting individuals from underrepresented groups to become involved in local volunteering, residents associations, political parties, school governance, and campaigning on local issues

3. School based and informal education programmes to build resilience among young people – programmes that encourage young people to think critically, question divisive narratives, understand different cultures and religions and engage with the causes of and solutions to prejudice and marginalisation

" I think having [people from different backgrounds] interact more will obviously help because when people talk they always end up finding some common ground... But I don't really know how or where or why that would happen... "

Prejudice and Us

During Summer 2016 Protection Approaches launched an innovative pilot project Prejudice and Us with young people who live in the Hammersmith area of London. Alongside internationally renowned photojournalist Cinzia D'Ambrosi, we worked closely with more than 60 young people from marginalised socio-economic, ethnic, religious and cultural groups to explore their personal experiences or perceptions of prejudice. Using photography, film, interviews, drama, and other mediums the young people shared what prejudice means to them and documented what it is like to be a young person in London today. The stories and experiences formed the basis of a physical and digital exhibition that the project participants presented to decision makers and decision shapers at London City Hall in December 2016.

The project revealed prejudice and marginalisation is an ever-present problem affecting the lives of young people in numerous ways. Those we worked with come from diverse backgrounds yet we found many shared experiences of being treated differently or targeted for abuse. We were shocked by the extent to which these shared experiences contribute to a normalisation and acceptance of prejudice among the young people, many of whom who see being treated negatively as part of their day-to-day lives.

Key findings:

- There is a deep awareness among young people that socio-economic status impacts opportunities. Perceptions of inequality foster frustration and at times a 'them and us' mentality. Many vocalised a belief that although they share a geographical space with more privileged people, their experiences are so far removed from one another that they "do not live in the same city"

- There was a feeling that in London, vocalisation of overt prejudice has become more socially unacceptable but continues to manifest in discrete ways and remains prevalent behind closed doors. This more covert prejudice continues to divide, marginalise and be felt

- Young people are aware the way they dress changes the way they are perceived and treated which in turn can lead to a sense of anger against those they feel judge them

- There is increasing fear among young Muslims of becoming victims of Islamophobic attacks and anxiety that large proportions of the UK population think "all Muslims are terrorists". In some instances, this is leading to self-isolation and a sense of not fully belonging in British or the capital's society

- Anxiety and deep frustration around the perceived misuse of 'Stop and Search' exacerbates mistrust of the police and the State, and feeds the belief among young people from marginalised communities that they are seen only as a problem or simply as criminals by the wider community

- Young people fear that prejudice and divisions are on the rise, not just in London or the UK but around the world, which is shaping their visions of their own futures

These findings reflect the wider picture across the UK. In a recent Ipsos Mori and BBC global survey 'A world divided' 85% of respondents said they felt Great Britain to be very or fairly divided and 73% felt that Great Britain is more divided today than it was ten years ago.

Find a full report on our findings at publications.protectionapproaches.org

" Maybe more activities. I don't find there is much going on here so maybe more activities, I think like games where everybody can come together... cooking... music... you know, have everybody come together. "

Bridging divides: views from West London

We were dismayed to discover just how far removed many of the young people we worked with felt themselves to be from older, more affluent, privileged, or powerful members of their local community. At a time when our communities in the UK are feeling increasingly divided, when hate crime is on the rise in London and across the country, and the alienation of marginalised young people is contributing to a spike in serious youth violence in the capital, finding ways to bridge these divides is an urgent concern for us all.

In search of these solutions, we returned to the diverse Hammersmith area of West London to hold workshops, interviews, and on-the-street conversations with hundreds of people from all corners of the local community to investigate how they think the divides in their community could be bridged. Questions and discussions explored what could be done to promote cohesion among all residents of the local area as well as the specific issue of how to narrow the growing gap between young people from often marginalised groups, and older people from more affluent or privileged backgrounds and those occupying positions of local power.

The solutions put forward by community members can be broadly split into three main themes:

1. Creating opportunities for people from different backgrounds to come together for meaningful interaction
2. Empowering people from marginalised communities, to become more involved in their local democratic processes
3. School based and informal education programmes to build resilience amongst young people

1. Increased opportunities for people from different backgrounds to come together for meaningful interactions:

This was the solution most commonly given by community members, however nearly all recognised how difficult it is to achieve. One local resident said "I think having [people of different backgrounds] interact more will help because when people talk they always end up finding some common ground... But I don't really know how or where or why that would happen..."

For an interaction to be meaningful conversations must go beyond the surface of mere small talk or being friendly, to ones in which people exchange personal information and experience. A meaningful interaction might be one in which people talk about shared interests, common goals, shared concerns or difficulties, or perhaps about each other's differences, perspectives or identities. These interactions should leave all parties feeling they have had not simply a positive experience but an opportunity to both be heard and to listen. Feeling represented or being given the opportunity to participate is often felt to be far more important than assuming a status quo of agreement. And ideally interactions should be sustainable long-term rather than a one off.

Many of those we spoke with felt that while there are plenty of opportunities to share spaces with people of different backgrounds, few truly encourage people to

engage. Community events tend to see people stick to their own friendship, family, or broader identity groups while events organised with the intention of promoting interaction for its own sake tend to appeal only to those who are already positively engaging with people of different backgrounds. Bringing people together in order to bridge socio-economic and generational divides was identified as being particularly challenging.

Most people we asked found it difficult to conceive of spaces, events, or activities where people from many different backgrounds or from different generations would come together for meaningful interactions. There was a recognition that most people are busy and do not want to attend activities or events specifically designed to facilitate social interaction. Instead it was felt that spaces, events and activities should be developed that are likely to appeal to a large number of different people in the first instance because they offer something enjoyable and/or useful. Working with members of the community, local residents, and existing grassroots networks or organisations is therefore essential.

Some popular ideas of activities that might attract different people included free, regular sports events or activities that are open to all, events or activities focussed around music - particularly performing and creating music, and opportunities for skills sharing where community members offer to teach skills to other community members. Many stated a desire for these activities to be intergenerational.

Case study 1:

Minhaj-ul-Quran Mosque in East London offers free English language drop-in classes three days a week. These classes, run by members of the Mosque, are open to all levels of learners and to anybody in the community. Although in the beginning these classes were primarily attended by recent immigrants from Muslim majority countries, over time as word spread, recent immigrants from all over the world began attending. Today a majority of the students come from Eastern European countries. Many of those attending had never been in a mosque before and never had meaningful interactions with Muslims. after a short time attending these classes any misconceptions they have had about Muslims were broken down as they got to know their teachers and the wider Mosque community.

Key principles:

- Create opportunities for meaningful interactions that people want to attend because they offer something enjoyable or needed by the individuals
- Events, spaces and activities should be co-designed, with community consulted on what they want or need
- There are particular benefits to ensuring young people are engaged in such activities as they so often feel excluded from local and community processes, and because there are still in the process of forming habits of social interaction
- Community activities organised to facilitate interaction for its own sake are not attractive to many who would benefit most – instead these interactions should emerge out of shared interests. It is better to take advantage of 'everyday' tasks in which people are involved, using familiar activities and venues rather than simply relying on 'one-off' events

" Maybe there could be events that could encourage people to get together to learn about each other's beliefs, maybe like a debate sessions, you get a lot of young people who like debating and stuff so I think that could be useful… Or maybe like workshops in schools to go around schools to get people together to talk about their beliefs… "

2. Empowering people from marginalised communities to become more involved in their local democratic processes

Community members recognised that those from marginalised communities and particularly young people are underrepresented in local democratic processes. By democratic processes we mean a broad range of activities and actions that allow people to be heard by, to influence, and ultimately to become the people who make or shape the decisions that affect their own lives and local area.

This lack of representation perpetuates a sense of powerlessness among often marginalised communities and particularly the youth. At the same time, underrepresentation contributes to wider negative social processes of discrimination and exclusion, which lead to implicit, verbal and physical manifestations of prejudice. These mutually reinforcing processes form a cycle of social exclusion and prejudice that becomes very hard to break, and that exacerbates material, political, and a sense of social inequality.

Those we spoke to, who came from all corners of the local community, believe there should be more support given to marginalised and underrepresented groups to encourage more to become involved with local volunteering, to take active roles in tenants' and residents' associations, to participate in local party politics, contribute to consultations, to sit on school governor boards, attend police ward panel meetings, and to take part in or lead local advocacy campaigns.

Again, in practice this is difficult. For many young people who self-identify as coming from social, economic, racial, religious, or other groups they feel to be underrepresented in local and national political processes, their experiences (and perceptions) of social and political inequality made them feel that political spaces were not spaces they could, should, or would ever occupy. Many others, particularly those from more marginalised communities, expressed anxiety that their day to day priorities were concerned with fulfilling primary needs such as food, clothing, shelter, and security.

While in the most part people we spoke with, from many different corners of Hammersmith society, from across the generational and socio-economic spectrum, expressed the desire to participate, most also saw engagement with local and national democratic processes as a luxury that their time would not afford. Some young people, however, could not see the benefits to themselves, their families or their wider community of becoming involved with democratic processes. Despite a high level of engagement with and frustration at political issues, it became clear that many from marginalised communities do not feel that official political spaces or processes are open to them – we heard again and again that these processes 'are not for people like us'. Repeatedly, we heard that the social norms, (perceived) social standing and identity of other participants and local leaders, and the language that is often used, can be alienating and at times even exclusionary.

Key principles:

- It is important to recognise the barriers that prevent many from more marginalised communities from becoming involved in their local democratic processes. Programmes promoting community development and supporting empowerment of marginalised individuals should be prioritised

- Voluntary and community sector organisations should work proactively with marginalised communities, including working through informal networks, ensuring that all views are heard
- Programmes that train young people in community organisaing - bringing people together to take action around their common concerns and overcome social injustice – could be a positive way to demonstrate to them the benefits of engaging in democratic processes whilst ensuring they have the skills to become involved as they reach adulthood

Case study 2:

The London based Roma Support Group's Roma advocacy and campaigning project supports Roma refugees and migrants to participate in decision making processes and encourages local/regional practice to be more responsive to their needs. By training Roma champions in campaigning, advocacy, and media relations and supporting those champions to attend local meetings and events it works specifically to increase the sense of belonging within the community of Roma individuals and to reduce social isolation by strengthening the voice of the Roma community.

3. School based and informal education programmes to build resilience amongst young people

A very common suggestion of how best to bridge divides in communities was education. Many believe that school-based or informal educational spaces should teach young people about difference, identity, and communication. However, most people we spoke to, especially those from more marginalised communities, feel that it is as important to equip the next generation with the skills to think critically about the causes and solutions to prejudice and marginalisation, as a means of strengthening youth resilience to divisive narratives in the local area, in the public press, online, and in national politics.

Anxieties around rising racism, Islamaphobia, and other implicit, verbal and physical manifestations of prejudice are seen in part as a result of propaganda and 'fake news' becoming more pervasive. As a result, members of the local community in Hammersmith believe there is a responsibility for educators and community organisations to ensure young people know how to decipher truth from fiction, particularly with regards to those who are seen as 'different'.

In-school programmes that help prepare young people to participate in democratic life, from the local to the global level, are felt to be lacking. Many believe current national curricula do not sufficiently prepare young people to active local, national, and global citizens. For young people to feel they have a stake in society and have something to offer, schools should teach skills of inclusive leadership, diverse participation, and help pupils become responsible members of their communities.

It is clear that there are many barriers to taking these approaches forward. Many teachers do not feel they have the skills or knowledge to teach around these often difficult and sensitive issues, while others simply do not have the time in their

timetables (or workloads) to integrate learning objectives outside of the curriculum. Cuts to local services and resources were also acknowledged. In a community facing growing and diverse challenges, but with fewer resources, creating new informal education opportunities is a challenge.

Case Study 3

The Harrow Club W10 is a youth club in North Kensington providing local young people with accessible and high quality opportunities, enabling them to maximise their life chances and to enhance their personal development. Alongside fun recreational activities, sports and outward bound programmes for young people and other disadvantaged or marginalised members of the local community, they also provide informal education programmes that support young people in becoming better involved in local democratic processes and to increase their understanding of prejudice and diversity.

Working with local and external experts and organisations the Harrow Club helps encourage local young people to explore their own attitudes to prejudice, to investigate the diverse history of the local area, and to think about how media can influence opinions. The Club aims to work with socially excluded youth to build self-confidence, guide personal development, and broaden their sense of opportunity.

Since the tragic fire at Grenfell Tower, which deeply affected the club and its members, Harrow Club has been working to support local young people in engaging with conversations in and about their community. Responding to a growing desire from young members to participate in local debate and process, including the pursuit of justice since the fire, the Club has been working to build the young peoples' skills of local public participation.

Key principles:

- Education in school and in less formal environments should:
  - seek to build the skills to analyse information and think critically about rumours, stereotypes, and other identity-based opinions; but also to ensure young people have the confidence to consume information on and offline and determine fact from opinion or dis/misinformation
  - invest in strengthening understanding of and sensitivity to difference but, crucially, also ensure that young people are encouraged to talk about difference and discuss conflict
  - prioritise the civic education of young people to ensure all members of our society progress into adulthood equipped with an understanding of how local, national and global decisions are made, and with the skills and confidence to participate in local and national daily democratic life
- At a time of overstretched resources, schools, local communities, and civil society organisations should work together to share the burden of ensuring the next generation are able to fulfil their potential and equipped to participate in their societies

> " It's easy to highlight the issues and it's much harder to come up with solutions… I think more intergenerational activities, because there is a lot of skill sharing that could go on. Older people have dying skills like sewing, and creative arts and craft… DIY skills that seem not to be taught so much these days to the younger generation. And the younger generation live their lives more digitally which is a skill that older people perhaps feel lacking in, so it would be nice to have a platform where they could skill swap and support each other… over snacks as well. "

Recommendations

Bridging community divides: recommendations for local community organisations and local government

- Events, spaces and activities should be co-designed – working with a broad section of community members to understand what they want or need
- Voluntary and community sector organisations should work proactively with marginalised and underrepresented communities, including working through informal networks, ensuring that diverse views are sought and heard
- Programmes promoting community development through building capacity and representation of marginalised communities should be prioritised
- Activities or approaches to community building that seek to bridge generational and socioeconomic divides in communities should be prioritised
- Create opportunities for meaningful interactions that people want to attend because they offer something enjoyable or needed by the individuals
- Education in school and less formal environments should be supported in helping build the skills to analyse information and think critically about rumours, stereotypes, and other identity-based opinions; but also to ensure young people have the confidence to consume information on and offline and determine fact from opinion or dis/misinformation
- Invest in strengthening understanding of and sensitivity to difference but, crucially, also ensure that young people are encouraged to talk about difference and discuss conflict, and so move away from simply 'speaking out and shutting down'
- Prioritise the civic education of young people to ensure all members of our society progress into adulthood equipped with an understanding of how local, national and global decisions are made, and with the skills and confidence to participate in local and national daily democratic life
- Schools, local communities, and civil society organisations should work together to share the burden of ensuring the next generation are able to fulfil their potential and equipped to participate in their societies

What next?

Prejudice and Us:

In response to the findings of this project, Protection Approaches is now working expand its activities working together with local communities across London to find shared responses to the prejudice, hatred and divisions that allow exclusion, and extremisms to thrive. We prioritise efforts to build capacity of marginalised or underrepresented socioeconomic, ethnic, religious and other communities to lead on engaging members from the wider community.

First we work on building relationships. We spend time meeting with members of the public, representatives from different community religious groups, the Local Authority, duty bearers such as the local police, youth workers, and head teachers, and other local stakeholders. We see our role as being a facilitator, connecting groups and individuals who may share experiences of marginalisation or social exclusion yet rarely engage in the wider community. We build informal networks based on a solidarity of shared experience. Protection Approaches brings together diverse members of local communities with local decision makers, in environments designed by the local communities themselves, providing opportunities to engage in conversations on the local divisions identified in phase one. These conversations will explore solutions to local divides and begin to build a network of those willing to work together to tackle them.

Schools based workshops:

Our facilitated school workshops are designed to equip the next generation with the understanding and strategies they need to reject prejudice and violence. These interactive and participatory workshops explore historical and contemporary examples of identity-based violence to help young people discover their common causes; from hate crime in our own communities to genocide and terrorism around the world. In doing so, young people are more easily able to understand what seem like a complex set of unrelated issues and gain a greater understanding of our collective responsibility for tackling identity-based violence in all its forms.

In addition to our workshops, we offer a range of ways to support schools and students on an ongoing basis; from training for teachers to help achieve a positive and inclusive school culture to free resources and toolkits to support teachers once we have left the classroom .

Over the next year we will be expanding this programme not just in schools but, as a response to the findings in this project, we will be also be exploring ways we can take these workshops into informal education environments.

Research and Policy:

We measure how our work in local communities changes the behaviour, understanding, or feelings of those who we interact with. We undertake short interviews with all participants both at the beginning and end of projects and conduct short interviews with community members, decision makers and decision shapers who interact with the project to understand whether they have identified an impact. The results of our monitoring and evaluation are made public and shared with local and national duty bearers. This research forms the basis of our policy engagement work in Parliament.

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