

Factor in Faith

Working towards a faith and
culturally sensitive youth sector



Factor in Faith principles

Faith, beliefs and culture can contribute a great deal to an individual's identity. A wide group of national charities and youth organisations have got together with NCVYS and agreed to support the following principles.

These have informed the document that follows. We hope these can form the basis of a discussion within your organisations and with the young people you work with.

- Our organisation will build bridges between young people of different faiths and cultures, including those who have no religious faith.
- Our organisation will make links with other organisations which are based on different faiths or cultures from our own.
- Our organisation will create spaces where young people can talk freely about their faith, culture and beliefs.
- Our organisation will help young people to oppose prejudice and oppression based on a person's faith or culture.
- Our organisation will do all it can to be sensitive to young people's faiths and cultures.

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Why Factor in Faith

In autumn 2005, the National Council for Voluntary Youth Services (NCVYS), in partnership with the Muslim Youth Helpline, conducted focus groups and an online survey to assess young people's opinions of the proposals for 'places to go and things to do' in the *Youth Matters Green Paper*¹. This research highlighted significant issues in the way young people of faith perceived mainstream services and activities.

At the same time reports published following the attacks in London on 7 July 2005, highlighted some young people of faith's disengagement with society². These reports threw the spotlight on the role of the voluntary and community youth sector in tackling disaffection faced by young people, particularly those of a minority faith and cultural background. The voluntary and community youth sector has a key role not just to tackle youth marginalisation but also to challenge prejudicial attitudes and bring down barriers between young people they work with.

In January 2006, NCVYS convened a working group of interested organisations to work together to tackle these issues. This document represents one of the outcomes, and is accompanied by ongoing work and debate within the voluntary and community youth sector.

This document aims to assist organisations in responding to the needs of young people of all faiths and cultures, and also those of no faith. This is important as there are overarching issues and isolating those within one group could be counterproductive. So while this document does not attempt to tackle the bigger issues of diversity, it will, in the context of current UK issues, attempt to make organisations that work with young people more faith and culturally sensitive.

Introduction

Aims and audiences

No organisation can assume issues of faith and cultural sensitivity are irrelevant to them. It is important for any organisation to consider their whole community, not just those young people who are already engaged. Be aware that your organisation can play a part in encouraging young people to be outward-looking and going beyond where they start³.

However, some organisations may decide that not all the recommendations are achievable or relevant. For example, organisations may have the advancement of a particular faith or religion as their mission or charitable objective. To this end, faith-based organisations may actively encourage members of that faith to apply for jobs within that organisation.

It is hoped that such organisations will still be able to take something from this paper. But the intention of the authors is that, if fully implemented, the recommendations will provide a comprehensive checklist for organisations that are striving to work with young people from every faith and culture in the communities they operate in.

Holistic approach

The recommendations that follow should be seen in the context of developing a young people-centred service for your community, with the awareness that diversity exists within and across all communities. In other words, while diversity policies and checklists may be useful, a better approach is to begin with diversity in mind. So your diversity policy is not just an add-on, but you have a faith and culturally sensitive organisation, and the principles of equality and diversity are integrated throughout the organisation.

Identity and diversity

A further point to remember is that young people cannot be considered in silos according to their faith or culture. Some of the recommendations below do reflect particular faiths or cultures, but young people's identities, in common with all others, consist of many complicated layers. The importance of intra-cultural factors, such as generation, musical taste and so on, cannot be overlooked. The issues will vary depending on the community you are working with – there is no one size fits all approach. It will be important to get out into the community to find out what the particular faith and cultural issues are.

Resource implications

This document is intended to be useful for even the smallest organisations that may be just starting to think about diversity. Such organisations are likely to have very stretched resources, if they have any at all. Hence many of the recommendations below are intended to demonstrate how simple and inexpensive reforms can be. Some small changes may make a big difference to the way you are perceived by young people and the local community.

But, as your organisations grows, diversity will need investment if it is to be done properly. Some of the references at the end of this paper will provide a starting point for this.

Learning organisations

Finally, this document is only one tool and culture is a dynamic force, so you should strive to create a learning organisation. This may be defined as:

An organisation where people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free, and where people are continually learning to see the whole together. ⁴

This will mean creating learning situations throughout your organisation: promoting exchange of information, and not being afraid to talk about difficult issues.

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Recommendations

1. Governance and planning

- With young people, agree on a proactive anti-discrimination stance that runs throughout the organisation: aim for a holistic approach.
- Develop an equality and diversity policy in consultation with young people, community groups and your workforce. This should cover every area of your organisation's activities, from your mission statement to volunteer recruitment policy.
- Widely distribute this policy, both internally and externally. As with all policies, review it regularly – ideally once a year.
- From this set an action plan with targets, so that you and your workforce have a clear idea of what can be achieved and by when. An evaluation of this action plan should form part of your annual report.
- All the documents in this area: policies, action plan, annual report and so on, should be young people-friendly. If necessary, work with young people to also produce a young person-friendly version. This should then be promoted in an appropriate way, for example, taking it out to where young people are.

2. Recruitment and workforce development

- Strive for a diverse workforce and one that is reflective of the community you operate in. Assess the present position to establish your starting point, and monitor progress towards this objective.
- Consider the volunteer benefits that you offer (for example, expenses, training or accreditation opportunities and gaining transferable skills to employment) and actively promote them.
- Offer pre-employment training, where appropriate, to help those from minority groups to apply for positions in areas where they are underrepresented.
- Review recruitment, selection, promotion and training procedures regularly to ensure that you are delivering on your policy.
- Consider your organisation's image: do you encourage applications from underrepresented groups and feature a diverse workforce in recruitment literature?
- Develop links with local community groups, organisations and schools, in order to reach a wider pool of potential applicants.
- Provide training for all people throughout your organisation, to ensure they are faith and culturally aware. Provide additional training for members of the workforce who recruit, select and train your employees.
- Build equality objectives and performance indicators into all job descriptions and ensure these are subject to appraisal.

3. Setting the scene

- Begin by working with your young people to agree standards of behaviour. These may include not discriminating on the basis of faith, as well as class, sex etc; not imposing religious views on others; recognising the value and sacredness of all individuals' cultures; and so on. These can then be displayed in your club or meeting place. Do this exercise alongside activities that explore issues around faith and culture.
- Make sure information on different faiths and cultures is freely available. See www.bbc.co.uk/religion or www.multifaithnet.org or the other references below for materials.
- Ensure support and advice is available for young people who experience discrimination or harassment.
- Aim to create an open and unthreatening environment where questions can be asked and issues addressed.

4. Practicalities

- Offer certain activities in a single-sex environment, for example sports, arts, drama and dance.
- Provide a quiet space, that can be used for reflection, prayer and so on.
- Provide environments where there is no alcohol.
- Be aware of special dietary requirements. If in doubt, do not be afraid to ask.
- Be aware of religious and faith days and what these mean, see www.interfaithcalendar.org. Talk to young people and community groups about planning an interfaith event around these days.
- Be sensitive when planning the time of meetings – for example, it may be helpful to avoid prayer times or evening sessions.
- If using uniforms or costumes, be aware of faith-based dress practices.
- Include diverse images of young people in all publicity materials (observing legal requirements to seek permission first).

www.bbc.co.uk/religion

www.multifaithcentre.org

www.interfaith.org.uk

5. Activities

- Work with young people and local communities to develop an appropriate curriculum. Aim to build in elements that enable young people to explore issues relevant to faith and cultural equality.
- Use or work with young people to develop information, games and activities which can be used to eradicate cultural and religious myths, and which reflect the history and culture of different ethnic and religious backgrounds, see www.interfaith.org.uk for ideas.
- Encourage and support young people to develop and lead their own projects, for example to explore issues of faith and culture from their own point of view, or to respond to their communities' particular needs.
- Through political education and activities, empower young people with the skills and tools to be politically active if they wish, and to express appropriate action within the democratic process.

6. Families and community

- Build and maintain links with local faith and community organisations; work together to deliver programmes that aim to foster community relations.
- Be aware of issues with language. Although not always necessary you may need to provide information for parents or carers in a number of languages appropriate to the community/ies you work in.
- Be aware that a whole-family or whole-community approach may be needed. This will build understanding and trust in your organisation, and thus encourage young people from certain communities to be involved.
- Involve positive role models from the community in your activities who reflect young people's identity.
- Work with community groups and young people to build awareness of the issues specific to the communities you want to work with.

1. Suleyman, M (2005) *Youth Matters: A report from Muslim Youth Helpline and the National Council for Voluntary Youth Services*
2. *Working together to prevent extremism report* Home Office 2006
3. Davies, B (2006) *Youth work: a manifesto for our times*, Leicester: National Youth Agency
4. Senge, P. M. (1990) *The Fifth Discipline. The art and practice of the learning organization*, London: Random House.

While diversity policies and checklists may be useful, a better approach is to begin with diversity in mind.

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Endorsement

Young people of faith bring certain values and principles - altruism, respect for others, ethical behaviour and community solidarity - which shape and motivate their endeavours. By working with others with different beliefs who share these values, they play a pivotal role in achieving common goals.

Factor in Faith makes an important contribution to this by outlining the steps that youth organisations can take to become more aware of cultural and faith sensitivities. Barriers are broken down - and the feelings of isolation and alienation which detrimentally affect vulnerable young people can be tackled.

Parmjit Dhanda MP

*Then Parliamentary Under Secretary of State
Communities and Local Government 2007*

Contacts

BBC Religion and Ethics website

www.bbc.co.uk/religion

Equality and Human Rights Commission

Tel: 020 73117 0235
www.equalityhumanrights.com

Diversity and Dialogue project

Tel: 020 7566 4138
www.diversityanddialogue.org.uk

GERI (gender equality and race inclusion) Project

www.geriproject.org

Institute of Race Relations

Tel: 020 7837 0041
email: info@irr.org.uk
www.irr.org.uk

Interfaith Network for the UK

Tel: 020 7931 7766
email: ifnet@interfaith.org.uk
www.interfaith.org.uk

Multifaith Centre

Tel: 01332 591285
email: mfc@derby.ac.uk
www.multifaithcentre.org

Runnymede Trust

Tel: 020 7377 9222
email: info@runnymedetrust.org
www.runnymedetrust.org

Voice4Change

Tel: 020 7843 6130
www.voice4change-england.co.uk

You will also find the details of your local racial equality council in the telephone directory.

Legislation

Race Relations Act 1976

This Act makes it illegal to discriminate on the grounds of colour, race, nationality and ethnic or national origin in the fields of:

- employment;
- training or related matters;
- education;
- the provision of goods, facilities and services; and
- accommodation.

Race Relations Amendment Act 2000

This places a 'general duty' on all public bodies, including local authorities, schools, the police to:

- to eliminate unlawful racial discrimination
- promote equality of opportunity; and
- promote good race relations between persons of different groups.

Racial and Religious Hatred Act 2006

This Act creates an offence of stirring up hatred against persons on religious grounds. This aimed to fill gaps in the Public Order Act 1986 which made it illegal to threaten people on the basis of race or ethnic background

Single Equalities Bill

The aim of this Bill is to make Britain a fairer place to live and work by simplifying – and adding provisions to extend protection where it did not previously exist or is inadequate – and thereby improving access to the law by bringing together over a hundred laws and nine major pieces of legislation in to one bill. The bill places a duty on all public bodies to "...consider the diverse needs and requirements of their workforce, and the communities they serve".

NCVYS

The National Council for Voluntary Youth Services is the independent voice of the voluntary youth sector in England. A diverse network of voluntary and community organisations and local and regional networks, NCVYS works to inform and influence public policy, support members to improve the quality of their work, and raise the profile of the voluntary and community sector's work with young people.

A note on language

Throughout this document, the term 'workforce' has been used as a shorthand to include paid staff, volunteers and trustees.

For more information about Factor in Faith visit www.ncvys.org.uk If you would like a copy of Factor in Faith in another format please contact NCVYS at the details below.



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