



## **Developing Good Relations in the North West Connecting Communities work 2010 - 2011**

The Centre for Good Relations is an independent social enterprise which has emerged from work in Burnley and other North West towns.

Good relations work takes people through dialogue processes, which unpack issues and tensions, creating space for participants themselves to work towards positive outcomes.

Our contribution can:

- Build understanding between groups and communities that are at odds with each other...
- Help develop agreements between agencies, elected representatives, community members and others...
- Address polarising behaviour...
- Work around conflicts, campaigns and disputes over business developments...
- Explore community dynamics resulting from changing demography; bring parties together who are in dispute over the control of facilities and initiatives...

The Centre is committed to developing good practice by building up close links with other organisations, and by openly sharing effective ideas and approaches.

The Centre provides training, carries out casework on a range of issues, delivers projects, and is involved in a range of networking, learning and development activity.

Casework can involve assessments; 'civic diplomacy'; separate meetings and joint meetings with parties to an issue; workshops; developmental work; and longer-term projects.

We use approaches drawn from good practice in community cohesion; intercultural dialogue; tension monitoring; mediation; deliberative democracy; and conflict resolution.

### **The Connecting Communities opportunity**

As part of the Connecting Communities programme, the Centre was asked to share information about the approach we take to work, and to give people in other areas a taste of the way we seek to unpack and develop dialogue on contentious issues.

Through the work, Centre representatives made contact with people from a range of local authorities in the region involved with the Connecting Communities programme, and offered informal advice on a range of issues.

The Centre delivered a series of half day briefing sessions which have offered 'a chance to discuss techniques for working through conflicted issues in our communities; to get a taste of training now being offered to front line neighbourhood workers, community activists and others; and to network with colleagues from other districts in our region.

These were held on the following schedule.

Monday 8 March 2010	The Gateway, Warrington, WA1 1SR
Thursday 11 March 2010	St. Augustine's Avenham Centre, Preston, PR13YJ
Friday 12 March 2010	Manchester Town Hall, Manchester, M60 2LA
Monday 19 April 2010	Penrith Leisure Centre, Penrith, CA11 7YG

The briefings were followed up by one day 'conflict awareness' training sessions in which participants developed understanding of 'how contested issues build up into conflicts; look at ways of making sense of disputes; and to consider their own styles and approaches in conflict situations. The training opened up discussion about effective ways to address and manage conflicts in work in local communities.

These training sessions were held on the following schedule:

Thursday 25 March 2010	Town Hall, Warrington, WA1 1UH
Monday 29 March 2010	GHS Centre, South Meadow Lane, Preston, PR1 8JN
Friday 23 April 2010	Government Offices for the North West, City Tower, Manchester, M1 4BE
19 May 2010	Government Offices for the North West, City Tower, Manchester, M1 4BE

The briefings and workshops proved popular: most sessions were full and a few were oversubscribed. Here are some comments from the evaluation forms:

### **Briefings**

- Very well planned
- Would have been good to have more time - I will sign up for the training
- I can see the need to develop communication as part of the connecting communities programme
- I think this was pitched at the right level - a challenge, given the mix of people in the room
- It would have been possible to run the session for a whole day, going deeper into the issues
- It was really positive to listen to other people about their concerns, in a range of different parts of the County, and to see the variety of organisations represented
- Enjoyable

### **Training**

- Very informative, interesting
- The delivery was friendly and professional at the same time
- I will be able to add mediative skills to my approach
- Good pace and strong content
- Very good
- Some of the case studies could have been more complex to stretch participants more
- I would like to do more practical training about what to do in my work role
- The group sometimes felt too large - perhaps this training would work better with about 12 people rather than nearly 20 ??

- The training was very good: it would be good to do more training on these issues
- Very relevant to issues in my area

**The following outputs resulted:**

- Forty four Members and officers briefed and developed through regional half day workshops
- Nearly seventy Members, officers and others briefed and developed through the one day 'introduction' training courses (many of these being additional to those Members and officers briefed and developed through the half day workshops)
- By far the biggest grouping of participants was made up of Officers and Members from Local Authorities delivering Connecting Communities projects. This work has directly developed awareness and skills, and explored the way the good relations approach can link and add value to the Connecting Communities Programme and to other current initiatives on regeneration and civic participation. By raising awareness of how issues become conflicted, and how positive actions to address disputes and conflicts are part of the repertoire of interventions available at local level, confidence is increased to overcome the barriers to community relations.
- Networking activity and 'civic mediation' has developed connections between local authorities, the Centre for Good Relations, North West Together We Can and other relevant bodies
- Following the sessions, an approach to regional practitioner development was designed and delivered. This helped build the capacity for good relations work to improve social cohesion across the region.
- This regional practitioner development work has involved a Northern England Networking Seminar on 27<sup>th</sup> May 2010, which received additional support from the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust, and a follow on event in Blackburn on 1<sup>st</sup> March 2011, which was also supported by NWTWC. There are learning seminars for emerging practitioners taking place in Blackburn (April 2011) and in Burnley (May 2011).

**Further information about the work of Centre for Good Relations is available on request.**

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