

**GETTING RESULTS:
CONFLICT RESOLUTION
PROJECT**

**EHRC
FINAL REPORT
SCHEDULE 2 – FUNDED
OUTCOMES 2007-08**

**AN ADAPTED CONFLICT
RESOLUTION SKILLS MODEL**
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A Project Funded by the EHRC

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BACKGROUND

This report is the culmination of two years of work undertaken by brap for the Commission for Racial Equality, now subsumed under the umbrella of the Equality and Human Rights Commission. In Year One from 2006 to 2007, we were funded to

'pilot a new conflict resolution model that will provide short term and long term approaches to resolve intra and community/interfaith conflict amongst the voluntary sector.'

We quickly realised that it was extremely ambitious to attempt to originate a new model but that it was quite feasible to adapt and redevelop existing models. In doing so we would ensure that the exploration of equality issues was embedded. Our adapted model was piloted with a number of voluntary and community organisations and changes were made in response to their comments and evaluations.

In Year Two we had refined our approach to conflict resolution and the funding required us to engage in

'Dissemination of conflict resolution model... Model will be rolled out to develop the skills of Black and Minority Ethnic voluntary organisations including RCOs. This will increase the capacity of voluntary organisations to understand how to respond to/ diffuse potential inter-ethnic tensions and promote better relationships between communities.'

INTRODUCTION

The violent community conflict that occurred in Bradford in 2001 and Birmingham in 2005 created a short term surge of interest in the value of conflict mediation techniques: in the hope that they might offer organisations a new approach to dealing with conflict situations. In the aftermath of the rioting in Birmingham, many community organisations were included in the discussions and meetings that focussed on trying to explain what had happened and to plan for a better future for local communities. These meetings, however, were not always productive. Across the country many voluntary and community organisations are habitually very partisan: so discussion centres on issues that they think are

particularly important to 'their' community, which clearly clouds their ability to mediate effectively and fairly.

The setting of our conflict resolution project is Birmingham. Given the city's history and profile, it is not surprising that the need to find robust approaches to conflict resolution is particularly important. Birmingham is a modern city that still has quite traditional ways of working when it comes to approaching its citizens. The disturbances and violence that took place in October 2005 were centred around Lozells, Handsworth and Soho and this was the second time that these areas have been subject to community unrest. In the aftermath, the standard approach, utilised by government and city leadership, to identifying, probing and solving the problems has been to seek the advice and cooperation of voluntary and community organisations. These bodies have often had a long standing presence in the area. They are used as conduits to the community; frontline operators who must have their 'finger on the pulse' and know exactly what has happened, why and what solutions should be. In particular voluntary organisations are expected to play a role in de-escalating tensions, calming community frustration and advocating, with a clearer message on behalf the community. However, often the opposite is true. Many of the organisations encouraged to be part of the solution are often quite sectarian in their focus and engagement with the issues. They operate (and are funded) on the basis that they are serving a particular community. Their view of that community (and others) is often very narrow and laden with unacknowledged stereotypes. Few have a broad or progressive understanding of the concept of 'community', as well the exploration of issues of equality, diversity and fairness is sadly lacking. Consequently, Lozells, Handsworth and Soho as well as other deprived areas such as Shard End, Kingstanding and Weoley Castle see little change or progress in tackling pressing problems. This results in misunderstanding and resentment between different areas of the city whose population may be ethnically 'opposite' but have very similar social issues and problems. The organisations that have traditionally been part of the problem solving process polarise communities further as they become involved as adversaries rather than allies looking for mutual solutions.

Birmingham's Demography

In 2001 the census indicated that the demographic make up of the city was 65.5% White British and just below 30% Black and Minority Ethnic (including White Irish) residents. (See Table below) Recent population projections indicate that Birmingham will eventually be one of Europe's a 'majority – minority' cities.

DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF BIRMINGHAM
(2001 Census Data)

ETHNIC GROUP	Percent age
White British	65.6
White Irish	3.2
Other White	1.5
White & Black Caribbean	1.6
White & Black African	0.2
White & Asian	0.7
Other Mixed	0.5
Indian	5.7
Pakistani	10.7
Bangladeshi	2.1
Other Asian	1.0
Caribbean	4.9
African	0.6
Black Other	0.6
Chinese	0.5
Other	0.6
TOTAL	100%

Although Birmingham is already one of the most ethnically, and religiously, diverse cities in Europe, it has been unable to achieve equality of outcome for its citizens. Disadvantage is ethnically patterned and many BME residents suffer disproportionately in terms of housing, health, education and employment. One consequence of this is the existence of sometimes hostile environments where people, often leading quite parallel lives, are forced to compete for limited resources. The most recent community disturbances that occurred in the city were in Lozells / Handsworth and Soho: these are amongst the most economically deprived areas in the country, let alone Birmingham. Indeed, BME groups (including newly arrived refugees and asylum seekers) are concentrated here as well as in other inner city areas like Sparkbrook, Small Heath and Sparkhill. All of these wards are characterised by high levels of deprivation, educational underachievement, crime and unemployment.

Northfield, on the outskirts of the city, is one example of a largely populated by the 'white' ethnic majority area, where residents experience similar deprivation to those of the BME population.

Birmingham also has the youngest population in Europe, with 50% of the school age population coming from BME backgrounds.

Despite the diverse mix of many of the city's schools, Birmingham's young people are ill-equipped to challenge territorialism, poor or unresponsive services and the re-enforcement of narrowly constructed identities. Due to geographical segregation and 'parallel lives,' the potential for misunderstanding, reinforcement of stereotypes and conflict is heightened.

Consequently, there is much need for specific interventions, which mitigate the potential fall out resulting from the 'ghettoisation' of some parts of the City and the 'gated' communities emerging in other parts.

The responses to Birmingham's challenges from the city's leadership have not been progressive. Brap has been fortunate to work with a range of voluntary, community and refugee organizations. Through ChangeUp, similar projects and membership on strategic bodies we have sought to support and contribute to initiatives aimed at raising the quality of activity in the third sector to make it 'fit for purpose'. Our conflict mediation programme is a feature of our commitment to the community cohesion agenda.

PROJECT AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

Our Approach

The Getting Results project represented an opportunity for brap to pilot our adapted conflict mediation skills model particularly with BME voluntary and community organisations. This is a form of action learning where Year One saw our draft programme developed and piloted, and Year Two was the implementation and evaluation phase of our revised model/ programme. Our intention is that this programme should contribute to building the capacity of the sector, in particular so that voluntary and community organisations are more competent to deal with inter-ethnic and intra-ethnic tension and promote better relationships between communities.

What is mediation?

Mediation takes place when there is a voluntary meeting between disputing parties, it is facilitated /managed by a mediator who is a neutral third party. The mediator's role is to help the disputants find a solution, or come to an agreement to end their dispute. Ideally the mediator hopes to find a conclusion which both parties are happy with.

In the last decade mediation has been offered as a method or process to use to resolve neighbourhood conflict or community

disputes. It has been used with varying degrees of success. In particular, it has been favoured as it aims to be impartial, as well as solution and future focused. This is important as disputes can be prolonged when the parties involved spend time dwelling on events which have past rather than looking at how they might go forward. In addition, what mediation does offer is the opportunity for stories to be told or aired fully and sometimes this in itself moves parties away from entrenched positions and halfway to a workable solution.

When it comes to conflict in Birmingham it has been our observation; both from reviewing current issues of conflict and dealing with voluntary and community organisations who are called to the table to debate and find solutions, that the conflict mediation methods used have limited success. Many of the conflicts that have occurred in Birmingham have their roots in misconceptions or discriminatory attitudes held by community members. We would argue that when these kinds of attitudes are involved mediation may not have much success. These beliefs remain unchanged even when people are presented with contrary evidence. For mediation to work there is a need for education to take place to challenge thinking and stereotypes. Hence this would support long-term change in community relationships.

In 2006 a number of voluntary sector staff, including members of brap staff, enrolled in an accredited mediation course which was validated by Open College Network (OCN). After completing mediation training, we identified issues related to equality that we thought were neglected by traditional mediation. Indeed, traditional conflict mediation programmes focus on finding a mutual solution through use of conflict resolution techniques, or negotiation skills. Whilst this is laudable, there is little account taken of whether the solution is fair or equitable. Nor is there much focus on the disputants learning or coming to a deeper understanding of each other. Traditional programmes do little to tackle or confront longstanding community hostility. Societal inequality or power imbalances are given scant attention, it is important that this knowledge and understanding underpins any techniques used. Given Birmingham's population profile and its community issues, mediators who have not had training that requires them to understand issues of 'race', ethnicity, deprivation and poverty both generally and in the context or setting in which the conflict is being played out, will rarely facilitate a 'fair' outcome.

Consequently, brap decided to integrate understanding of equality issues into our conflict resolution programme. Whilst we have adopted some of the exercises used in standard mediation programmes, such as *'The Orange'* and *'Understanding Positions'*

and Interests'. Our adapted mediation programme (See Figure 2) seeks to emphasize the importance of having a critical understanding community and equality issues which we felt would enhance the approach to mediation and settling disputes.

We have underpinned our programme with activities that aim to explore and enhance the historical knowledge and understanding of participants. Also we have sought to move thinking to a more modern and progressive place. With this adaptation the brap approach to mediation would better meet the needs of the diverse voluntary and community organisations we engage with. The enhanced mediation skills and knowledge they would acquire could be used to respond to, and diffuse, potential community conflict situations, rather than refuel them.

Figure 1

ACTIVITIES
<p>Welcome, introductions, rationale for the work, aims & overview of the programme and ground rules</p>
<p>CONDISERING DEMOGRAPHICS OF BIRMINGHAM</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Birmingham and its diverse population • The population and tension
<p>INSIDE: OUTSIDE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who do you work with? • What is the purpose of you the third sector • How are you funded? (Flip chart, whole group) <p>Policy Update – the rationale for change and dividing the ‘pie’</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Where things seem to be going for the third sector • ‘Taking the Gloves off’ – Strengths and weaknesses • The 4 Stances
<p>THE ORANGE – Playing to win</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • List options for The Orange and feedback for discussion (Paired activity, flip chart) <p>Equality Conscious Conflict Resolution</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exploring the themes / issues emerging from The Orange (small groups) • What impact should they have on our approach? (flip chart)
<p>LOOKING BACK TO GO FORWARD</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ From assimilation to anti-racism? - exploring race relations / social cohesion (small groups)
<p>Becoming ‘fit for purpose’</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understanding positions and interests – statements • ‘Want it need it,’ what do we have to provide?
<p>THE FUTURE - The Way Forward</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ What do we have to ‘give up’ to reduce conflict? ▪ Tensions between the personal and the professional ▪ Challenges of the Human Rights approach and conflict resolution ▪ Role of the mediator

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Broadly the aims of our programme are to:

- Promote a learning culture - one where knowledge and skills related to equalities, race equality in particular, could be openly discussed, questioned and acquired
- Help people **develop a more informed and confident approach** to equality implementation
- Make sure that **equality approaches are fair** so that 'biased' mediators do not have an adverse impact on conflict resolution or mediation sessions

Overall, we wanted to help organisations and individuals to explore, reflect on and develop their conflict mediation skills, so they could use them in real situations they may encounter.

Methodology: Recruiting Participants

In order to disseminate information about the conflict mediation programme we engaged in the following activities:

- Sent out online information flyer to those on the brap database, including affiliated organisations and third sector
- Publicised conflict mediation sessions /programme at our other workshops, conferences and meetings attended by brap staff
- Programme information posted on our website

We piloted the brap mediation programme in 2006 – 2007 and in response to feedback and evaluation we made changes to the content. The amended programme has been delivered on four occasions:

- 9 & 10 May 2007 (13 participants)
- 11 July 2007 (26 participants)
- 22 October 2007 (10 participants)
- 28 January 2008 (7 participants)

Each time we have made further changes in line with comments made by participants.

The participants came from a range of voluntary, community and refugee organisations. The final group was comprised of people who had been trained as Birmingham Community Facilitators their role is to step in to diffuse or mediate community conflict situations.

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

Impact Evaluation

"The exercise made me see how difficult it is to find a win / win solution for everyone."

"... helped me understand that people have varying degrees of knowledge about 'race' agenda so communication skills are vital."

"Has been practical with a focus on experimental learning and relating key concepts and principles to real situations.[1] Have personally gained a lot from the experience, not least confidence in approaching situations."

"Impartiality about things would be difficult to show when dealing with discriminatory views."

"Very interesting and informative facilitation program."

"I found the day challenged my thinking"

"Why should we change? Things have always been like this"

In general, the programme was well received and evaluative comments were very thoughtful. Participants' feedback came in both written and verbal forms with some also making contact by email to give their comments. One of the reoccurring issues raised by the participants was the challenges and internal tensions faced by organisations that want to stay up to date and build capacity but find they have to devote much of their energy to securing funds to remain viable.

- In reality, community organisations get caught up with fighting each other on an intra / inter-ethnic level and are unable to sustain a good relationship, often mirroring what goes on between disputants. brap hoped to show that if they could come to understand the needs and issues (positions and interests) underlying disputes, and to better understand the histories and legacies fuelling particular stances often a resolution might be found. This equality proofed approach could mean that solutions reached through compromise are viewed as 'win: win' because understanding is more holistic. Our emphasis, as with all with conflict mediation programmes, is to encourage participants to aim for a solution which results in a 'win:win' situation, where people are less likely to feel

that they have lost something. This we think, may lead to improved community relations

- A common response from programme participants was that they could not see how the solutions reached through mediation would not be seen as an unacceptable compromise. They felt that if mediation resulted in parties moving from their original starting positions, then this is a compromise, not a win:win situation, where someone is the loser. Based on their experience, they did not feel that they could get conflicting parties to agree to any solution that did not deliver what both actually wanted. This illustrates how important it is for all involved to understand precisely what mediation is and what it has to offer. It can only work for those who want it: to have any chance of success it must be welcomed by both the disputing parties and the facilitator.
- On a more cynical or pragmatic note, is there any incentive to find a resolution to a conflict situation which has generated funding for organisations for many years? In an era when funding is extremely insecure some organisations rely on discord to keep them afloat, therefore, they are not necessarily committed to finding a win:win solution because It is not good for business!
- brap's proposition is that in order to think more progressively about effective mediation and conflict resolution, organisations and individuals in them, need to move away from previous entrenched thinking outlined in *Figure 2*. This represents the positions typically taken by some organisations / individuals. We challenged programme participants to explore and discuss these in readiness for assuming the role of a mediator.

Figure 2

THE INDIVIDUAL	THE ORGANISATION
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identity politics (<i>focus on one or a limited aspect of a community's' identity e.g. Religion and ignore the importance of other identities</i>) • Gate keeping (<i>'only people like us know' or can offer solutions to problems</i>) • Who do we mean when we say 'disadvantaged' (<i>this needs to be extended, it is not always located exclusively with BME groups</i>) • Protecting cultures – (<i>if issues or behaviours are seen as cultural in origin then we cannot question or comment upon them</i>) • Ignoring other equality strands 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Single focus (<i>What is the rationale for this? It may be positive but it may have negative consequences too</i>) • Funding sources / bids • Concept of 'community' (<i>the definition being used may be ethnicised or unnecessarily exclusive</i>) • Automatic conflict with competing organisations (<i>there may be a legacy of approaching community conflicts or issues in this way</i>) Dividing up the 'pie' (<i>the approach to sharing resources needs to be revisited to ensure there is room for thinking about fairness</i>)

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Further discussion and work need to be done to enhance the understanding and commitment to equality amongst those in community and voluntary organisations
- Conflict resolution and mediation techniques do have their limitations especially where parties do not believe that solutions that everyone can live with are possible. Sometimes issues have been around for such long periods of time that it is nearly impossible for those affected to see the issues in a fresh way. For some sectors it is usual to have disharmony rather than calm: that is how things have always been.
- The Black and Minority Ethnic communities that have generally been seen as key players in community conflict have had to endure the attentions of very fickle local and national governments. When there are 'events,' like the violence in Bradford and Birmingham, there is a frenzy of media and government attention but this fizzles out when the story is no longer hot or sensational, regardless of whether solutions have been found. Indeed, if the solutions are too complex and require a much longer engagement than planned then typical injections of short term funding and the acceptance of poor quality activity are unsurprising and likely to fail. Nevertheless everyone moves on. Many organisations lack the resources to devote themselves to thoughtful conflict resolution because they have to invest a great deal of energy into keeping themselves afloat and seeking funds to do so when interest has moved on.
- It would seem that the agenda of government and funding bodies has indeed moved on. Although we launched an online network on the brap website there has been little activity. Consequently, conflict resolution and mediation, though important, is not uppermost on the agenda for organisations, particularly RCO's, who have to engage in a daily struggle for survival.