

## FAITH, COHESION AND SPORT: A PERSONAL VIEW THROUGH THE PRISM OF LEICESTER – STEVE WHITE

***The main reason different ethnic groups don't mix is not because they don't want to but because they have no reason to.***<sup>1</sup>

Community Cohesion Review Report

***Sport has the power to change the world: the power to inspire, the power to unite people in a way little else can.***<sup>2</sup>

Nelson Mandela

***We need to use the six years up to 2012 to promote sporting activity across racial and religious boundaries. Sport should be a great unifier... Over the next six years we should be aiming to reduce to zero the number of people who play only with and against people of their own race and religion. Get it right and the legacy from the Olympics will not just be medals or sporting infrastructure or regeneration in East London or a positive image of Britain abroad but vital bridges between communities who have used sport to promote tolerance and understanding.***<sup>3</sup>

David Miliband, MP, Minister for Communities and Local Government

The Community Cohesion Review Team Report, published in December 2001, highlighted the need to make community cohesion a central focus of national strategy. It argued the need for a shared sense of belonging based on common goals and core social values and the need for respect between different ethnic, cultural and religious groups.

In this paper, I argue for a greater recognition for the power of sport to bring about community cohesion.<sup>4</sup> I also suggest that there has never been a more appropriate time for a nation-wide community sports renaissance; furthermore, that we are fortunate in the East Midlands in being well-placed to offer a lead in this work as the nation prepares for the Olympic Games in 2012:

There is agreement on the growing importance of sport in late modern societies. The cultural critic, Martin Jacques, described the 1990s era and beyond as the age of sport, just as rock music became the dominant culture form in the 1960s and 1970s... so it is now sport which is apparently ubiquitous, the metaphor of the time.<sup>5</sup>

It could be argued therefore that sport is now our modern zeitgeist.

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1 Extract from Saffron/Highfields Community Cohesion Annual Report, 2004/05 sponsored by Sport England, Introduction.

2 Extract from speech by the Sports Minister, Richard Caborn, delivered at Leicester Tigers Rugby Club 2005 (after match against an Indian 15)

3 Extract from speech given by David Miliband, MP, Minister for Communities and Local Government at the Scarman Memorial Lecture, 31 January 2006.

4 But note the booklet entitled *Bringing Communities Together through Sport and Culture*: [http://www.faithandcohesion.org/index.php?option=com\\_docman&task=doc\\_details&gid=48&Itemid=34](http://www.faithandcohesion.org/index.php?option=com_docman&task=doc_details&gid=48&Itemid=34)

5 Extract from Community Cohesion and Sport (Draft) by John Williams (2006), to be presented at the Institute for Community Cohesion Conference at Loughborough in July 2006 (date to be confirmed).

This paper has been written as a series of ideas and impressions garnered from my own experiences based in Leicester for over fifty years, including seventeen years as the head of a well-respected comprehensive school (Rushey Mead Secondary) and as the Chair of the City Cultural Strategy Group for over three years. My direct involvement continues with schools, youngsters and teachers through my role with the SDSA. At the end of the paper I describe my lifelong personal involvement in sports, faith and education development. The examples in this paper relate to developments in Leicester, but they represent work which, quite literally, has global implications for the uniting and community-building powers of sport.

## **SPORT AND COHESION**

So what of the interface between faith, cohesion and sport? In 2002, I was involved in producing a report for Leicester City Council entitled Taking Forward Community Cohesion in Leicester.<sup>6</sup> This included the following statement about Leicester's cultural diversity:

the richness and depth of Leicester's celebration of cultural diversity is a real strength. Cultural diversity is seen as a means of tackling social deprivation, revitalising neighbourhoods and regenerating the city. It must have a broader role if it is to move community cohesion forward. The report recognises that leisure and sporting activities are key areas that can break down barriers, bring people together and engage young people positively.<sup>7</sup>

This quote seems to have considerable resonance with the following:

Sport has the power to change the world: the power to inspire, the power to unite people in a way little else can.

This is from one of the most iconic figures ever to walk this earth, a man of faith who clearly believes that the opportunity for sport to play a key part across the world is central. This is *Madiba* Nelson Mandela.<sup>8</sup>

## **HARNESSING THE OLYMPIC DREAM**

The U.K.'s successful bid to host the Olympic Games in 2012 gives us an unprecedented national opportunity to harness grassroots community energies around a cause that transcends social, ethnic and religious divisions. I believe that a determined and strategic national effort to use this as a driver for community cohesion is now needed. David Miliband, a leading member of the Labour Government Cabinet thinks likewise:

We need to use the six years up to 2012 to promote sporting activity across racial and religious boundaries. Sport should be a great unifier... Over the next six years we should be aiming to reduce to zero the number

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[http://www.faithandcohesion.org/index.php?option=com\\_docman&task=doc\\_details&gid=58](http://www.faithandcohesion.org/index.php?option=com_docman&task=doc_details&gid=58)

7 Extract from Leicester City Council's application for Beacon Status for Culture and Sport for Hard to Reach Groups, 2006.

8 In South Africa he is often known as *Madiba*, an honorary title adopted by elders of Mandela's clan. The title has come to be synonymous with Nelson Mandela.

of people who play only with and against people of their own race and religion. Get it right and the legacy from the Olympics will not just be medals or sporting infrastructure or regeneration in East London or a positive image of Britain abroad **but vital bridges between communities who have used sport to promote tolerance and understanding.**

The SDSA in Leicester has drawn up a plan of action to promote the involvement of young people in this process and to ensure that opportunities for youth leadership and active citizenship through sports are maximised. A starting point for this is to raise young people's, and the whole community's, awareness of the Olympic Dream which encapsulates so much: striving for continual improvement in human achievement, team unity and support, healthy competition within an agreed framework of rules and rights... all of which brings communities together... the whole is ultimately about the spirit friendship, or to borrow a South African concept, *umoya* – the spirit of togetherness. The Olympic Dream is at the core of the desire for world peace and unity between sports, cultures and global communities. No other movement has so powerfully captured the human hearts for positive purpose.

The Olympic Games will bring increased enthusiasm for participation at all levels of sport. The related social investment, associated with the Games, during the next six years has the potential to generate growing pride, self-belief and a 'feel-good factor' across our diverse communities. Leicester City Council is keen to play a key part in the staging of the Olympics and this could bring enormous cultural and sporting benefits to the people of Leicester. Leicester as the UK's most diverse city has an international reputation for community cohesion, recently winning designation as a Beacon Council for Culture and Sport for hard to reach groups. The Olympics will offer an ideal opportunity to showcase Leicester's rich cultural heritage to the global audience through various sport, faith, cohesion and youth leadership projects.

In the speech cited above, David Miliband also refers to the challenges which impede the building of community bridges. He refers to race and religion. The campaign across the football world to eradicate racism in the sport is now well established. It is now widely accepted that we need to combat racism where it occurs in any sport, and also to promote opportunities for people of different ethnic backgrounds to get involved. It is also recognised that considerable work remains to be done in this field. Maybe there is a similar construct around religion to that which has confounded our progress with regard to race. Recent years have seen the discourse on discrimination and racism shift towards recognising the increasing significance of religion as an indicator for discrimination – with people of different ethnic backgrounds sharing common experiences resulting from their common religious identities. The well-established work combating racism in sports (such as 'Foxes Against Racism', linked to Leicester City Football team and its local community) needs to reflect on the changing public awareness of religion – and engage with the faith communities in common cause to eradicate extremism, sectarianism and bigotry of any kind.<sup>9</sup>

## **LEICESTER CITY AND COUNTY AT THE HEART OF NATIONAL SPORT**

The City of Leicester and County of Leicestershire have growing reputations for sporting excellence with four professional teams playing in our city: the Leicester City Football Club, the Leicester Tigers Rugby Club, the Leicester County Cricket

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<sup>9</sup> For an example of the 'Foxes Against Racism' work read the letter from the Federation of Muslim Organisations in Appendix 1.

Club, the De Montfort University Leicester Riders Basketball Team and in Loughborough, the Leicester Ladies Hockey Team, all at different times excelling in their respective sports domain. In the education world we are also developing a number of specialist sports colleges: the Lancaster School and Sports College, Crown Hills Sports College and Rushey Mead Sports and Science College, all in the city and Burleigh and Bosworth Community Colleges in the County. There is also an established tradition through the Leicester City Council Sports Services Department continually developing grassroots opportunities. Another piston in the engine that is driving local sports excellence is Loughborough University with its international reputation for sports development.

The City Council has deservedly been awarded Beacon Status for culture and sport with regard to 'hard to reach' groups. This is the Council's eighth award for beacon status. Prior awards include Race Equality and Community Cohesion. All the factors above confirm the readiness for Leicester City and County to play leading roles in promoting sports development as a strongly empowering force for community regeneration.

### **SOME PRACTICAL EXAMPLES**

A selection of local activities will illustrate the range of ways in which sport is already breaking down community barriers. Firstly, from a report in the *Leicester Mercury*:

Muslim leaders are to face police on the football field. Teams unite for the beautiful game. Religious leaders and police are teaming up to show off their skills on the football pitch. *Imams* and scholars will take on the Leicestershire Constabulary... The Muslim team is hoping to repeat its success of two months ago when it beat a team made up of members of Leicester's Christian clergy 5–0. The match was organised by the Muslim–Christian Dialogue Group.

(*Leicester Mercury*, page 23, Thursday 16 March 2006.)

The Council of Faiths in the course of its work has influenced the range of inter-faith dialogue groups. Some of these in turn have decided that sport can bring respective communities together. It is interesting to note that in this example, the football match between the Muslims and the Christians was refereed by a Jew. They are now looking to combine their forces to play against the Constabulary.

Over many years in Leicester there has been a Vaisakhi Football Tournament. (The Sikh New year commemorates the day when the tenth guru, Gobind Singh, founded the Sikh brotherhood.). This football tournament has been run on one of our local parks and has attracted teams from far and wide.

Sport England has supported the setting up of a Saffron–Highfields Community Cohesion Project. This links two very contrasting areas of the city. Shubaan, a local Muslim youth group from Highfields estate and a similar age group from Saffron estate 'Saff Stars' were brought together to play football. Sport is the vehicle to address issues of understanding and accepting personal differences. The project is ongoing, people are making new friends whilst working together. 'There are no strangers here, just friends you haven't met yet.'

*Celebrate 80* is a big day out at Abbey Park, Leicester on Saturday 3 June 2006. The Archbishop of Canterbury has agreed to attend. The day features a community cohesion world cup football tournament, inviting youngsters from primary schools in the city and county and also our complementary schools (out-

of-hours community schools). The aim of the event is for youngsters from faith and no faith coming together to enjoy sport in the presence of a wide-ranging audience from different faiths. The Leicester Council of Faiths will be funding the 'world cup' trophy. There will also be a major exhibition linking anti-racism and sport and the launch of a book featuring the Leicester City Football stars of recent years from the black and minority ethnic communities.

## **COUNCIL OF FAITHS AND YOUTH FAITHS FORUM**

'The Council of Faiths in Leicester is another agent for inter-faith cohesion. It was formed in 1986. It has performed a variety of important roles including high-level discussion between faith groups, making joint public responses to potentially divisive external events, fundraising and educational work. It has also worked with the Police Service to raise awareness and support moves towards a more representative workforce. Recognition that young people were not fully represented in these activities has led to the establishment of a Youth Faiths Forum. This has organised several local conferences and visits abroad bringing young people together to discuss mutual concerns and formulate practical solutions.'<sup>10</sup>

## **THE INSTITUTE OF COMMUNITY COHESION**

Another factor that will enhance developments across the Midlands is the close proximity of the Institute of Community Cohesion, jointly hosted by the two Leicester Universities in association with Coventry and Warwick Universities. Preliminary work for this institute has provided further working definitions which are of relevance:

Community Cohesion is about breaking down barriers between people, bringing people together and engaging everyone positively in the future of Leicester. In this way harmonious relationships will continue to be encouraged and developed between all communities and Leicester will be a safer and happier place in which to live.<sup>11</sup>

## **THE ROLE OF THE MEDIA – 'REPORTING DIVERSITY'**

The unifying potential of sport cannot be fully realised without the key messages reaching all the far-flung corners of our communities. The media have a central role in disseminating these messages and championing sport as an essential agent for community cohesion and regeneration. If the media are to fulfil this role, they need a more sophisticated understanding of diversity than that which is currently displayed by many of our popular national newspapers and broadcast stations.

In this area, Leicester benefits greatly from the Multicultural Advisory Group. Established in 2001, this group brings together civic leaders, religious leaders and editors of local media, including The Leicester Mercury, BBC Radio Leicester and the Midlands Asian Television Network. Nick Carter, the Editor-in-chief of the *Leicester Mercury*, recently wrote the introduction to a significant report entitled

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10 Extract from *Tolerance to Integration: Building Lasting Cohesion and Prosperity in Leicester* prepared for the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister by Professor Ivan Turok.

11 Extract from *Taking Forward Community Cohesion in Leicester, Summary of the Report of the Improvement and Development Agency* – 2003.

[http://www.faithandcohesion.org/index.php?option=com\\_docman&task=doc\\_details&gid=58](http://www.faithandcohesion.org/index.php?option=com_docman&task=doc_details&gid=58)

*Reporting Diversity – How Journalists can contribute to Community Cohesion.*  
This introduction set out a simple and useful definition of community cohesion:

A cohesive community is one which ...

- there is a common vision and a sense of belonging for all communities;
- the diversity of different backgrounds and circumstances is appreciated and positively valued;
- those from different backgrounds have similar life opportunities;
- strong and positive relationships exist between people from different backgrounds in the workplace, in schools and within the neighbourhoods.<sup>12</sup>

The document gives advice on the different faiths from a media perspective and guidance on the sensitive use of language.

One of the greatest challenges facing editors today is to keep in touch with the accelerating pace of change in our communities. Of these changes, one of the most important is the size and significance of the different cultural and faith groups. Our awareness of the issues that can develop around these changes is helping to drive the debate about community cohesion, how it can best be achieved, and what is the role of the media in this process.

(Nick Carter, Editor in Chief, *Leicester Mercury*, *ibid.*)

Leicester currently has a 38% minority ethnic population; in this context the major local media have all played their part in reporting issues around faith and cohesion sensitively. This report is a significant and helpful contribution.

## **SPORTS CENTRES FOR ALL**

So what of the future in Leicester?

Strategic work is needed now to maximise the community benefits during the preparation for the Olympics (2008 and 2012) and the next Commonwealth Games in India in 2010. The Football World Cup in South Africa 2010 is another land-mark. I am working with others to set up Sports Centres for All (SCAs) first in Leicester and then we hope in Leicestershire. The first centre is to be established at the Human Welfare International Charitable Trust Centre at Ashford Road Leicester. This follows the inspiration of their Chairman, Baba Jaswant Singh who already has an established trust in Ludhiana in the Punjab. The first phase will have an indoor arena suitable for fitness and multi-skills development. Several approaches to this work are being explored: one example is the SAQ® Training currently being used at Piper School in Leicester in conjunction with the Lancaster Sports Partnership Project.<sup>13</sup> This will be followed by a centre for basketball and table tennis.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Extract from Nick Carter, introduction to *Reporting diversity – How journalists can contribute to community cohesion*. Society of Editors and the Media Trust, funded by the Cohesion and Faiths

Unit of the Home Office (nd):

[http://www.faithandcohesion.org/index.php?option=com\\_docman&task=doc\\_details&gid=97](http://www.faithandcohesion.org/index.php?option=com_docman&task=doc_details&gid=97)

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.saqinternational.com/newsitem.asp?nid=123>

<sup>14</sup> The 'Sports Centres for All' team now assembled to undertake development work including the training for leadership comprises: Karl Brown, the Head Coach of the Leicester De Montfort University Riders Basketball Team; Julie Bradshaw, swimmer extraordinaire; Jayant Mistry, wheelchair Wimbledon Doubles Champion; Nev Hamilton, ex Leicester City Football Club who is now a professional football coach; Gaynor Nash, Hockey and Football International and senior coach with Leicester Ladies Hockey; Darren Maddy, England and Leicester County Cricket Club; Ishmail Saleh, Leicester Martial Arts

## TRAINING YOUNG AMBASSADORS

Recruits and volunteers who work in the centres will have training through the Swapping Cultures Initiative. The Swapping Cultures Initiative, managed by Minorities of Europe<sup>15</sup> is now well developed and is cited by Ted Cattle as a successful example of practical cohesion work with young people.

## OPPORTUNITIES FOR PARTICIPATION AND LEADERSHIP

Involving people in sporting activities that encourage community cohesion will make a difference to their lives and the lives of others. For young people currently in school, this should follow on from the National Curriculum subject of Citizenship (a statutory requirement in schools since 2002), central parts of which are the skills of participation and responsible action:

Youth participation in and leadership of interfaith work could provide a rich seam of activities to fulfil this element of the National Curriculum orders (required both in KS3 and KS4). In urban areas where faith diversity is represented locally, engagement between faith groups within school with relevant local youth groups or with other schools could provide projects to deliver the skills specified in the orders.<sup>16</sup> (Faith and Cohesion Projects – Citizenship – Adam Newman Turner)

To develop opportunities and strategies for sport to play its part in community cohesion the principles of participation and responsibility must apply whether in schools and colleges or in the wider community. There are clearly no quick fixes and if we are going to be able to establish and promote the power of sport in a cohesion agenda we must bring people together in a non-threatening and safe environment from across ethnic and religious divides in order to build trust and respect. We need to enable the widest participation to facilitate more equal access to sporting opportunities and to promote successful role models within every ethnic and religious group. We must also create a stronger association between success of national teams and a vibrant support structure for them rooted firmly in local communities.

## THE RUSSELL COMMISSION

The Russell Commission reported in March 2005 with national recommendations on the following key issues:

- How can we achieve a step change in youth volunteering?
- What can be done to encourage more young people to volunteer and get involved in their local communities?
- How can their contribution be better recognised?

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World Champion and Senior Coach; Manjit Singh, strongman of Leicester; Lewis Moody, England, Leicester Tigers Rugby Club and patron of Anima Dance; and myself as a county table tennis player and coach.

<sup>15</sup> <http://www.moe-online.com/projects-summary.asp?PID=55>

See also the report of the pilot scheme in Coventry and Warwickshire (2005):

[http://www.faithandcohesion.org/index.php?option=com\\_docman&task=doc\\_details&gid=98](http://www.faithandcohesion.org/index.php?option=com_docman&task=doc_details&gid=98)

<sup>16</sup> Extract from Adam Newman Turner on Citizenship Education:

[http://www.faithandcohesion.org/index.php?option=com\\_docman&task=doc\\_details&gid=101&Itemid=34](http://www.faithandcohesion.org/index.php?option=com_docman&task=doc_details&gid=101&Itemid=34)

- Why do we need a new national framework for youth action and engagement?<sup>17</sup>

The first example of the executive summary promotes the involvement of young people in sports activities for better health. A new implementation body has been established (February 2006).<sup>18</sup>

## CONCLUSION

A shared national focus that emphasises encouragement for all to take part, at whatever level, alongside others from different backgrounds and, crucially, that also provides the local facilities and personal support to enable this, will undoubtedly be a vibrant force to build the social capital that has been singularly elusive in some recent attempts to regenerate our cities. Some of the essential enabling factors for this much needed national drive are emerging in the work now being undertaken in Leicester.

...Councillors who set up the community cohesion funding stream used this summer for a programme of inter-cultural sporting activities, partly in response to emerging community tensions between Somali and African Caribbean young people. More than 200 young people took part in the STREETSPORTS finale bringing together young people from 5 deprived communities. 10-year old Mohammed from Evington said it had given him a chance to play all sorts of sports: 'if this had not been running my summer would have been really boring.' (Leicester City Council application for Beacon Status, awarded 2006).

Now is the time to 'press the metal' or maybe light a torch (Olympic of course) to illuminate these opportunities and to present our developing ideas and good practice to the wider audience.

## SPORT, DIVERSITY AND COMMUNITY COHESION – A PERSONAL JOURNEY – STEVE WHITE

Faith, sports and the City of Leicester have played interlinked and central roles in my life, being brought up in Leicester, encouraged by my mother and father to attend Sunday School and get involved in church matters, which I did up to the age of about 11. I also was greatly motivated and encouraged by my religious studies teacher at my school, Moat Community College and regularly achieved highly in my studies. I then went on to do A levels at the Gateway College of which, until recently, I was Vice-Chair of the Governors. I then went on to St. Paul's, Cheltenham, to study what was then called Divinity.

Throughout my career of 38 years I have taught religious studies, especially through my influence at Rushey Mead Secondary (1985–2002). Recently I attended the conference entitled 'Interfaith and Citizenship' and in the working group Equipping Young People for Active Citizenship in a Multi-faith Society, I said: 'I was a teacher of divinity when I came out of St. Paul's Cheltenham in 1967 and I have gone through the whole cycle from religious instruction to religious education. It seems to me that within the ambit of RE now inter-faith

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17 Extract from: The Russell Commission - A National Framework for Youth Action and Engagement –Home Office 2005.

[http://www.faithandcohesion.org/index.php?option=com\\_docman&task=doc\\_details&gid=99](http://www.faithandcohesion.org/index.php?option=com_docman&task=doc_details&gid=99)

<sup>18</sup> <http://www.russellcommission.org/report/index.html>

issues can and should be pivotal.' I have been a member of the Leicester Council of Faiths for over 12 years. I got involved in talks and seminars on interfaith themes, much consultation on the formation of interfaith dialogue, assisting in the co-ordination of a multi-faith British conference and, more recently, consultation with Ted Cattle over the future of community cohesion. We have worked very closely and hosted visits from the Home Office and other ministerial groups and we advise on the formation of inter-faith groups nationally. Raising awareness of other faiths has been central to all the work undertaken and a number of very informative books produced, particularly the one entitled *An Overview of Major Faiths in the City of Leicester*.

Much of my work, certainly at Rushey Mead Secondary School and at the Foxes Against Racism focused on increasing racial awareness. The work undertaken at Rushey Mead School and throughout Leicester was praised by the Prime Minister:

The Prime Minister has asked me to pass on his personal best wishes to everyone at Rushey Mead and wishes you every success in the work you are doing to increase racial awareness. There is no doubt that the hard work being done will offer great individual reward to all involved and that the community has and will continue to benefit. It is crucial that others follow your example and equip young people with a knowledge of equality... **We recognise that the city of Leicester has indeed progressed tremendously in creating a community which clearly respects individuals irrespective of faith, origin or belief.**

(Policy Adviser, Patrick Diamond, on behalf of the Prime Minister to Steve White, 13 August 2001).

After retiring from Rushey Mead Secondary in 2002 I was requested by the Chief Executive, Rodney Green, of Leicester City Council to work on a report for the city entitled *Taking Forward Community Cohesion in Leicester*. Since its presentation back to the Council over three years ago I have been involved in much work through a focus task group, chaired by Rodney Green. From this taskforce there has been much work developing thoughts around community cohesion which has now culminated in the involvement of the SDSA in the establishment of the Institute for Community Cohesion, headed by Ted Cattle, which held its Leicester Launch on Monday 27 March 2006 at De Montfort University, Leicester.

## **ONGOING RESEARCH – SPORTING DEVELOPMENTS IN RELIGIONS**

To find out more about developments in Leicester through sports clubs and individuals I have devised a questionnaire. So far I received back a number of responses and it is my intention to present the findings to a Sport England Conference on Community Cohesion being organised by Russell Turner and Ted Cattle for June 2006. What is emerging is that faith groups do have a strong alignment which connects their faith with sport. In one return from the Leicester City Football Club Senior Executive, I was pointed in the direction of the Christians in Sport website.<sup>19</sup>

### **8. CONCLUSION**

After so much research, so many visits, so much discussion, the report's conclusion is simple and stark.

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<sup>19</sup> <http://www.christiansinsport.org.uk/>

It is abundantly clear that religion has the power to divide, the power to cause conflict and hurt. It is equally clear that religion, that people of faith and spirit, have the power to help create the just multicultural, multi-faith democracy for which we strive. The contribution that young people can make to create this society is of paramount importance. Our evidence is clear: generally young people of faith and spirit want to be involved not merely in dialogue but also in action. They are keen to become involved in real life projects that benefit their local neighbourhood, keen to discuss their faith and beliefs with others, and believe that more interfaith dialogue and engagement will help them both understand their own faith and beliefs more clearly, and help others to understand them. In short, inter-faith work can become a key vehicle for promoting the cohesive society all good people seek.