

FAITHSUNITED (TAMESIDE)

Network Consultation

Main Points from consultation exercise

Overview

This report summarises the key findings from the network review, and suggested actions arising from these, for discussion and agreement by network members. Over the coming weeks a full report which includes the results from all the networks will be produced, including recommendations for building on the service currently provided by T3SC to representatives. It is hoped that the information in this report will also support individual networks and Tameside Voice to make decisions about future direction.

It is clear from the Network Review exercise that Inter Faith network members feel the Inter Faith network to be important and worthwhile, the commitment of network members to bringing about positive change was very clear. The role that the network plays in building a greater understanding between Faith communities and the contribution it makes to community cohesion in the Borough came out very strongly. This is an important message at the present time, as current network funding is due to end in March 2008. Preliminary discussions with partners show that there is much support for the Voice networks, and recognition of the role of the Inter faith network. In this context the network review provides valuable evidence in support of securing future funding for the network as well as an opportunity to further improve the way the network operates, help members to think about future direction and ensure that the service provided by T3SC meets the needs of the network and its members now and in the future.

Key Findings

1. Most people came to the network for the first time as result of word of mouth invitation, from T3SC staff, other network members or hearing about the network at an event.
2. The majority of people attend the network because of an interest in Inter Faith issues, in order to gain better knowledge and understanding of other faiths and to build the Inter Faith community. Network members were very clear about this. This process of building dialogue and understanding was also a very clear motivation for members becoming representatives on other bodies.
3. The biggest barrier to new people coming to the network was identified as fear of the unknown- this included confidence, worries about status, not

knowing what commitment would be expected, not being sure about the aims and objectives of the network. Timing of meetings was an issue on which there was no clear consensus, evening meetings helped some people, who had other commitments during the day, but dark nights and fears about personal safety were identified as a barrier for older people and women, although the provision of transport to and from meetings was seen as positive.

4. The main points identified as part of a representatives job by Inter Faith network members were:

- Sharing information
- Feeding in community views and feeding back to communities about the work of the network
- Getting to know other representatives and understanding other faiths
- Learning
- Influencing decision making
- Promoting the network

Discussion Point: **What is the scope of a representative's job?**

When representing the network at partnership meeting does the representative have the authority to make decisions on behalf of the network? There were two schools of thought on this issue, some people thought that a representative should have delegated authority and be able to respond flexibly on behalf of the network, others felt that the representatives role was to feed information in and out of partnership meetings and should come back to the network for decisions.

5. There were many practical suggestions for a network induction programme, including:

- Brief introduction to each faith/visits to places of worship
- Who's who- Name badges and contact list
- Mission statement and aims and objectives
- Written introduction to group- frequency of meetings, purpose- terms of reference
- Welcome to new members- knowing other people, mentor
- Summary of recent activities/achievements
- Website
- Welcoming meetings- food, time for silence and prayers

6. The current level of support provided by T3SC to network representatives was seen as good. Honest discussion and debate between members at network meetings was seen to support representatives by ensuring the issues are fully understood. The following principle for provision of support was suggested:

'Support given should be discreet and appropriate, enabling the network to make decisions. Support should respond to identified need'

7. The need to receive agenda's and papers for partnership meetings in advance was highlighted; this would enable full discussion by the network. Information should be clear, concise, jargon free and appropriate to the audience.

8. The need for resources for publicity to raise the profile of the network was very clearly identified. There was also a suggestion that the network needed to meet more frequently to ensure continuity.

9. As well as specific suggestions for training for representatives (roles in meetings, structure and purpose of partnership meetings) the need for existing skills to be recognised was also highlighted. This was seen as an important factor in valuing and recognising the contribution made by network members and representatives, along with occasional social events, the payment of out of pocket expenses and publicity.

General comments

Many of the responses from Inter Faith network members mirrored those of other networks, although worries about the network becoming a talking shop, while expressed, were expressed less often by members of the Inter faith network. Problems around receiving papers from partnership meetings in good time are common across all networks and following the last Voice meeting this will be the subject of a joint statement from Voice networks to the TSP.

Recommendations

1. Personal contact is the main way in which new members are encouraged to join the network; to support this community outreach needs to remain a key priority for the network

2. There is a strong shared understanding between members about the purpose of the network, reflected in the mission statement developed by the network. Developing a clear set of aims and objectives which set out how this mission will be achieved could help to raise the profile of the network and ensure its role is clear to potential members, wider communities, partners and funders.

3. The recent decision made by network members to vary the times of the meetings to increase membership is borne out by the findings of the consultation. Current arrangements for safe door to door transport need to continue and be widely publicised. The network may wish to review access needs of members and potential members regularly, a participation budget to provide for childcare and other access needs will continue to be a priority for future funding.

4. The basis for a role description for representatives has emerged from the review, but before this can be produced agreement needs to be reached

around the scope of the role and how far a rep should be able to act on her/his own initiative. This will need further discussion by the network and could feature as an agenda item for a future network. Raise have produced a tool kit for representatives which contains some useful information on this issue (enc)

5. T3SC to develop an induction pack and programme for representatives, based on the responses of all networks to the review. The Inter faith network supported by the interfaith networker may want to specifically consider the production of a booklet introducing different faiths and a programme of exchange visits to places of worship. There is perhaps potential to extend this across other networks.

6. The induction pack will be an important way of ensuring that network members know what support is available and how to access this. Support offered to networks by T3SC has been based and should continue to be based on community development principles, this means supporting networks to identify and act on issues members identify as important, while promoting collective action and collaboration with other networks and groups, in order to develop a strong and cohesive voice for the voluntary, community and faith sector in Tameside.

7. The discussions about information revealed problems around receiving partnership papers and other information in good time, this was a problem for all networks and as such will be the subject of a joint statement from all Voice networks to the Tameside Strategic partnership.

8. Publicity and profile is a key objective for the network. The community cohesion conference clearly responds to this.

9. Celebration event for all networks to be organised by T3SC.

10. The information arising from the review exercise to be used to inform the work of T3SC and network members (currently ongoing) to secure further funding for the Inter Faith network

The Network is grateful to Lesley Connor and T3SC for undertaking the consultation.