



Visit to Barnet Multi-cultural Centre 26th April 2005

Introduction

The trip was organised by the Equalities Development Team from Community Development. Representatives from the Chinese Community Centre, the Chinese Welfare Group, the Asian Women's Group, Cambridgeshire Race Equality and Diversity Service, Cambridge Caribbean Association, the Ethnic Community Forum, the Pagan and Baha'i groups attended.



The impetus for the trip came out of the Cambridge Race Equality Action Plan for 2003/4. One aim was to investigate the possibility of a multi-faith facility and/or general meeting place for BME communities. The first action was to conduct a piece of research within the city, which included a question on the interest in having a multi-faith centre. The research was conducted in early 2004 and responses suggested that there was little interest in such a centre; however there appeared to be more interest in the establishment of a multi-cultural centre, which formed the new action for 2005/6.

At the end of 2004 a questionnaire was sent out to obtain an indication of the requirement for a multi-cultural centre and received a more positive response. The trip was arranged to look at an existing centre to see how it is managed and used. This centre has national Beacon Status for being a good model for community cohesion.

History of the Centre

The Centre was developed from 1996 – 1998. It became a Registered Charity and Limited Company in 1997. The cost of refurbishment was £350,000 – £400,000.



Initially approaches were made to Barnet Council for Voluntary Services (BCVS) regarding the needs of the communities, and BCVS was instrumental through networking in bringing together committed individuals from the three groups who undertook to work together. The groups moved in during 1998 with the help of Mayor Agnes Slocombe, and Barnet Council for Voluntary Service. There was a blessing from religious leaders representing the three resident groups, Indian Hindu, African-Caribbean Christian and Somali Muslim. The central issue was diversity so that there weren't small isolated groups in separate places, but that everyone was working together. There is no history of conflict between the groups.

[See Appendix 1 for structure chart]

Presentations were made by key member groups

Bhanu Mehtz and Sangita Pandya – Chair and Representative of the Indian Association

Seymore Jones and Maurice Archer – Board Member African Caribbean Association

Abdi Salaad and Abdi Isse – Barnet Somali Community Group

Issues to Consider

1. The council were crucial in identifying the building, which had been a sports centre but was no longer used. They also needed the council for external funding. The original funding came from:
 - London Borough of Barnet
 - Barnet Health Authority (Service Contracts for provision of day care for elderly people)
 - Bridge House Trust (A fund originally set up to repair the bridges in London)
 - City Parochial
 - The Community Fund – for 6 years
2. Crucial to build-in a large contingency – the costs rose by 40% from the start to completion of the work.
3. Excellent technical support is necessary – to ensure that everything that is needed is included and costed.
4. CVS did not cost everything in advance because they had not had the experience previously. They did not have the resources to support such a project. In the end the council gave them funds for a 6-month development worker post to ensure that the work was completed.
5. Listen to the community members, NOT just the architects who do not know what the people using the centre will require and how the centre will be used. An example of this was washing facilities for the Muslim community.
6. The three groups vowed to work together whatever the individual needs might be. This co-operation has led to understanding and an increased level of trust between the communities. For example, the Temple cupboard was built when



funds were low because the other groups recognised the importance to the Hindu community. Alcohol is tolerated on the premises for the African/ Caribbean community by the Muslim groups.

Managing the Centre

Issues of Maintenance

Health and safety – licensing, risk assessments

Repairs

Updating – decoration, furniture

Funding

10K – Lloyds TSB

25K – Council

Police have “safer community funding”

There is a shortfall which means the Manager and Deputy spend significant time on fundraising. Problems with funding include finding core costs!

Rental Charges

Sliding scales – depending on size and resources of group

One-off bookings charging the maximum fee – open to the wider public

Block bookings for regular time periods

Weekend and weekday rates

Financial Picture

Project Costs

Premises	£40K
Salaries	£70K
Other	£4K
Total	£114K

Income

Hiring	£44.5K
Grants	£35K
Groups Contribution	£10.5
Total	£90K

The Multi-cultural centre is about partnership, not ownership. The benefits of this are that:

1. There is a stronger voice for funding
2. This attitude fights prejudice and racism, and
3. Promotes understanding by involving people in each other's activities, and
4. Creates new partnership opportunities
5. The groups come together for centre projects such as multi-cultural day events and the inter-generational projects

Managerial staff spend a lot of time on finances and report to the board every 6 weeks.



Other management tasks include: building maintenance, and security (not everyone in the community sees such a project as positive).

Management of project activities: Multi-cultural day; Black History month; Inter-generational projects with the local schools; community activities and partnership working i.e. police (it is a reporting centre), the PCT (a nurse regularly attends health care sessions for the elderly) and the church next door which provides extra space for the multi-cultural day.

Centre Staff Roles

1. Project management and networking
2. Financial management and fundraising
3. Building management
4. The projects also have their own staff

Groups are separately funded according to the service they provide from the council, and some funding from the local PCT.



BOARD
9 members

The groups are independent but come together on the board to manage the centre. They all have separate constitutions, funding and charity status. Size and activity of the groups determines the space allocated to each group.

