



Anti-Sectarian Initiative

Executive Summary

The Machan Trust developed an initiative in the Larkhall area of South Lanarkshire aimed at reducing the incidences of sectarian anti-social behaviour through the education of P7 pupils. The initiative involved the provision of workshops in schools to address the issues of sectarian attitudes and to encourage literacy and script writing skills. Pupils utilised the medium of both art work and short plays to highlight key messages and these were displayed and performed at an event which was attended by family, friends, councillors and the media.

The initiative proved to be well received and extremely successful. The attitudes of young people towards people of different faiths, colour and race have been positively changed and the young people have taken up the role of helping others to see the negative impact sectarianism has on local communities.

The project won the Prevention and Intervention Award at the Safer Communities Awards 2012.

Project Background and Aims

Larkhall has historically had a poor reputation with regard to sectarianism due to its perceived connection with Rangers' football team, and the high attendance at Orange Order Parades held in the town. Therefore, over the last 5 years the Machan Trust has been working to bring local communities together to tackle the negative association of sectarianism within Larkhall. The Machan Trust is a joint churches' youth initiative to meet the needs of young people in Larkhall and the surrounding area.

As part of their work, the Machan Trust created the Anti-Sectarian Initiative with the aim of breaking down barriers across different faiths and to show the more positive benefits of working together regardless of background, colour, faith etc. Young people are often influenced by their parents' views, prejudices, likes and dislikes but equally they can be great influencers of their parents. The project aimed to challenge the views of local people by starting with the local young people and encouraging them to become responsible citizens by increasing their knowledge and understanding of the world in which they live.

The aims of the project were to:

- Improve the relationships between local young people from across different areas of faith, background and schools;
- Local communities benefit through less anti-social behaviour from young people;
- Young people will become peer role models for other local youths;
- Young people will have the opportunity to learn new skills and to take responsibility for their actions;
- Local adults will be encouraged to continue the message that sectarian behaviour is not acceptable.

Activities

The Machan Trust, in partnership with local primary schools, delivered a new initiative focusing on drama art and literature. In line with the 'Curriculum for Excellence' the project

ensured that pupils were able to learn through a variety of mediums, helping them to experience learning through art, drama, reading, writing and sharing with pupils from different areas backgrounds and faith.

The author Theresa Breslin delivered 20 workshops on her book “The Divided City”, which the young people studied as part of the school curriculum. These workshops re-enforced the anti-sectarianism message and encouraged the literary skills of the pupils. Freelance actor, playwright and director David Carmichael delivered workshops in partnership with youth workers and volunteers and 60 drama workshops were delivered at ten schools where over 80 scripts were created. Twelve drama sketches, tackling the issue of sectarianism, were fully scripted, rehearsed and performed by the young people. The 12 scripts were collated into an electronic work book which is available as a resource to tackle similar issues being experienced in other areas of South Lanarkshire. In addition, the art skills of the local young people were channelled into the creation of art displays.



Example of the anti-sectarian art work produced.

To celebrate and promote the work carried out by over 250 P7 pupils, an event was held in St Machan’s Church where the sketches were performed and filmed in front of family, friends and invited guests including councillors, clergy, head teachers, representatives from the Education Authority, Sense Over Sectarianism, author Theresa Breslin and actor, playwright and director David Carmichael. The event was featured on the 6pm STV news and two of the 12 sketches were shown live on National Theatre 5 minute TV. In addition, a DVD of one of the sketches has been recorded live at the STV studios.

Impact

Attitudes towards people of different faiths, colour and race have been positively changed. Feedback from the young people has been encouraging with the young people taking up the role of helping others to see the negative impact sectarianism has on the local community. The impact on the 250 young people while indefinable is evident in the positive way that the young people are mixing and getting along at various community clubs run by the Machan Trust every week.

The impact in the local community has also been seen through the reduction in anti-social behaviour from young people as they gained greater respect, acceptance and tolerance of others.

The launch of the electronic book of scripts and the display of art work have ensured that the local community are aware of the work the young people have been doing and supported the message that sectarian behaviour is not acceptable within the Larkhall communities. Additionally, young people shared their experiences with their parents, families and friends and as a result more people are now aware of the unacceptability of sectarianism.

The project created a sustainable resource which is currently being used by South Lanarkshire's Education Resources. The online resource of 12 scripts will be delivered in all primary schools, with new P7 pupils having the opportunity to develop and diversify the resource further in the future.

The project gained significant media and press coverage which positively highlighted the good work being done in the Larkhall and surrounding areas to tackle the issue rather than focusing on the more negative instances which have in the past attracted media attention.

Through the education of young people, the initiative was able to challenge existing sectarian behaviour in an area where there is a poor reputation for sectarianism. The initiative began the process of promoting and encouraging positive change. The young people were encouraged to share their learning in the family and in turn the ripple effect of saying no and not being part of anti-sectarian anti-social behaviour will improve the impact on the local community. Through this early intervention the project helps to stem sectarianism behaviour in the future.

Monitoring and Evaluation

Three months after the initiative took place, evaluation forms were given out to 144 of the 250 P7 pupils who took part. The pupils were asked about the various activities within the initiative. 73.3% of the pupils stated that they were great with remaining 26.7% stating that they were OK. When asked what they had learnt about anti-sectarianism 77% pupils responded with quotes which included:

- 'To never judge anyone by how they look and what they believe in';
- 'Doesn't matter what religion you are';
- 'I learnt that sectarianism means someone's getting teased about their religion';
- 'That it is wrong and that we have to try our best to prevent it!';
- 'Its wrong and it's a big problem that should be stopped';
- 'I can help cut it out'; and
- 'I have learned people from different non catholic schools are just the same as us'.

Lessons Learnt and Sustainability

The level of enthusiasm and commitment from the young people was underestimated, and had there been additional time and resources further visits from Theresa Breslin and David Carmichael, would have been beneficial.

The project has proved very successful and is one which will be delivered again in 2012, however, as an alternative, music will be used to help the young people tackle the subject.

Resources

Funding: £1500 from Larkhall Problem Solving Group;
£2200 from Sense Over Sectarianism.

In addition, the Machan Trust provided £1000 worth of in kind volunteer hours and free use was given of the Church Hall for

rehearsals and events, free transport to STV studios for professional filming and free production of 25 DVDs of the event.

Partners: Machan Trust, South Lanarkshire Council's Larkhall Problem Solving Group, Sense Over Sectarianism, Nil by Mouth, local chaplaincy.

Outcomes

National 9 – We live our lives safe from crime, disorder and danger.
11 – We have strong, resilient and supportive communities where people take responsibility for their own actions and how they affect others.

Local A reduction in the impact which anti-social behaviour has on people's lives; and
Young people will learn about taking responsibility for their actions.

Practice Note Information

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SCSN Topic Areas: Public Space Safety, Safety of Vulnerable Groups, Personal Safety
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