

The following report presents the feedback from an "open-space" type event with approximately 50 young people from 12 to 16 years of age from all over Scotland - which was part of the Equal Futures Conference held at the SECC in Glasgow on 2nd December 2003.

The workshop was facilitated by Alan Ross (an independent group worker) who asked the young people to consider:

- How racism, bullying and sectarianism affects them - even second or third hand perhaps when they witness, hear or see racism, bullying and sectarianism happening to others.
- What forms does racism, bullying and sectarianism take - and to consider:
- Is it always "in your face"? Or are some instances more subtle?
- If young people want to/need to/reach out for support/information, do they know where to go, whom to turn to?
- And finally - what are their suggestions/recommendations for addressing the three issues: racism, bullying and sectarianism?

The young people worked for an hour and a quarter with the facilitator to set the agenda for their own workshops - examining the issues which they wanted to discuss. From a range of topics they formed into small working groups to discuss an issue in depth - and then fed back their findings to the whole group.

The young people formed into - and self-facilitated 5 groups. No adults were present in the groups.

Four of the groups contained young people between the ages of 14-15: their findings are presented below with the title/heading/key word/question which they chose to discuss in italic type face.

1) Even if we're different (e.g. colour of skin and religion) we're still the same race - human beings! Why be racist?

- It starts when you are very young.
- Your parents and friends influence you a lot.
- Doing it (racism) to "fit in".
- Don't judge by appearances.
- If you're the minority you are more sensitive to racism. It may be because they're not a nice person that people are being nasty to you.

- They do it to feel superior.
- Separate schools make people feel different.
- Some people are racist because they are patriotic.
- You can be racist without realising it.
- You might be racist because people from ethnic minority groups have taken the jobs you want e.g. they're rich whilst you're poor.
- Racism comes from both sides.
- People are racist when people are different.
- You can be racist when people believe in different religions and when you have different principles - e.g. Asian women dress in a different way, like fully covering themselves but for British women there is nothing wrong in wearing "showy" clothes like bikinis.
- People want to buy like Gypsy clothes and Asian/Chinese food but make fun of these races.

2) *Why are some people sectarian?*

- Reason -
 - Sectarianism stems from a fear of social inferiority - meaning that certain races or religions are dismissed by others because they are seen as outsiders in today's routine of not being open to new ideas and different people.
- Problems created -
 - Stereotyping of people participating in any religion or race.
 - Automatic judging of appearances and character - resulting in being treated differently or preferentially to others.
- Solutions -
 - Solutions are hard to reckon with because of the media influence and/or upbringing.
 - Society is based on a certain routine of "normality".
 - To loosen this narrow minded and biased routine we must:
 - Somehow get the message across that everyone is individual and special, whatever culture.
 - Once someone is brought up racist it is very hard to change their opinion on this but as more is being done about racism everyday this can progress to a dramatic change in society.
 - Where is the love?

3) *Asylum Seekers - stop thinking of these people as a problem they are individuals and they have an opinion too.*

- Asylum seekers are only a problem if you make them a problem.
- Asylum seekers should be involved in making decisions that will affect them in the future.
- You should respect them for all the problems in their life they have had that you haven't e.g. wars etc.
- Asylum seekers should have equal rights and opportunities as everyone else.
- They should have the same job opportunities as everyone else.
- They shouldn't need to gain asylum illegally.
- They should be able to take the test for citizenship upon entering the country.
- The Police should not show any discrimination in dealing with cases involving asylum seekers.
- Prevention:
- Have stricter laws on discrimination.
- Don't give them labels - accept them as part of the community.
- Find out asylum seeker's views on how to prevent discrimination.
- They should have more severe punishments for people who take part in acts of discrimination.
- Accept their way of life instead of forcing the British way of life and views upon them.
- Give the media an outline of what they can and cannot say about asylum seekers.
- Be more discrete about how they bring them into the country instead of high-lighting them as asylum seekers.
- Give them better education so that they can get good jobs and make a good life for themselves.

4) *Nationality!*

- What is nationality?
- What do they look like?
- How we speak?
- What kind of person you are.
- Where you are born.
- Colour of skin.
- How to resolve them?

- Get to know each other more - talk to each other.
- How they feel.
- Be themselves.
- It is inside that counts not the outside.
- It is not their fault!
- Positives:
- It makes you an individual and special.
- It helps you understand different cultures.
- When you visit other countries it makes it more enjoyable.
- Keeps people with an open mind.
- Gives you more to talk about.

There was one group of 12-13 year olds who looked at 3 issues:

5) *Child Abuse (this topic was very highly ranked by the young people as one which they wanted to discuss - it should be noted that at the time of the discussions there was a very high profile murder trial at the Old Bailey in London of Ian Huntley for the murder of 2 girls who were of similar ages to those in the group)*

- They are mental!!!!
- They have health problems.
- They take their anger out on their children.
- They take drugs or have an alcohol problem.
- They are under a lot of stress.
- There's NO excuse.
- They enjoy abusing their children.
- There are tons of reasons.
- If it is a baby and they are crying then they might feel influenced.
- If they are depressed.
- They are weird.
- They are drunk.

6) *Why are people racist?*

- They only like people that are the same as them.
- Because they are not the same colour.
- They are either really mean or they are not the same colour.

- They could have encountered a problem or fight with someone from that race.
- Their family are racist.
- The other person was being racist to them.

7) What makes bullies do what they do?

- Jealousy.
- They have been bullied themselves.
- They have problems of their own.
- They think it's funny.
- They are acting tough in front of their friends.
- They have problems at home.
- They want attention.
- They think it will make them popular.
- They have no friends.
- They find it fun.
- To get things e.g. money.
- They have nothing else to do.

Some of the other areas which the young people wanted to discuss - given more time - included:

- From 12-13 year olds -
 - How can we help victims of bullies?
 - Is racial prejudice as bad as active racism?
 - Black or white? - Does it matter?
 - How would you feel if people were racist to you? Not a nice thought is it?
 - What can we do to stop racism?
 - What is discrimination?
 - Should there be separate schools for different religions e.g. Catholic, Muslim - or should religion be taught in the home?
 - Equal rights.
 - We have the right to live where we want and we have the freedom of speech even if we are from ethnic minority groups!

From 14-15 year olds -

- Alcohol in the family.
- Drugs in the neighbourhood.
- Abuse in the family.
- Street gangs.
- Not having to be in a house for a certain time e.g. because you are not safe.
- Why do people not feel safe in their home?
- Feeling safe in school.
- Bullying.
- Being a bully yourself.