

*This is a report of the **Multicultural Open Space** event which took place at Ocean Terminal in Leith on 20 November. We would like to thank everyone for giving their time on a Sunday to take part in a day's discussion. It was an inspiring first step. We look forward to the next step – turning **words into actions**.*

Can we listen to each other?

Media, immigration, political involvement and the need to make opportunities truly equal for all communities were among the most urgent topics for the audience in the huge open space at the top of Ocean Terminal on a cold Sunday in November.

After a day's discussion in small groups, people came together to vote on the actions they want to happen. These are the points we hope to take forward to the next Open Space gathering in May.

Our multicultural Open Space event was a step into the unknown. We did not know how many people would come or what they would choose to talk about. Invitations to the event simply asked people to bring their 'burning issues' around the question of what it is like to live in multicultural Leith.

The invitation began with a question, 'Can we listen to each

Open Space participants want to:

- Stop media scaremongering
- Welcome immigrants
- Develop opportunities for multicultural relationships
- Encourage ethnic minority politicians
- Promote positive role models
- Look out for each other
- Meet again in six months to make at least some of these things happen

other?'. The answer came on Sunday 20 November when over the course of four hours around 50 people came to take part in a day of discussion – and a buffet lunch – in the open space at the top of Ocean Terminal. Together we symbolised the rich diversity of cultures in the Leith area – Indian, Pakistani, Italians, Chinese, African, Caribbean, Polish, Irish, English, and Scottish: all were represented and all made a contribution (many brought food for the buffet lunch too!).

Some came as private individuals; some represented health, education, and police; many came from voluntary organisations providing information and social support for different minority ethnic groups. In large circles and small workshop groups everyone in the room showed willingness to listen to each other – even when the discussion



Thanks to: Maggie Havergal, Senior Associate Open Futures and Open Space Facilitator; Kerry Napuk, Director Open Futures Ltd; the management team at Ocean Terminal and Tommy Miah of the Raj Restaurant. The Multicultural Open Space event was organised by Leith Walk Central branch of the Labour Party. Planning team: Stewart Blaik, Mike Cowley, Jenny Duncan, Nick Gardner, Dougie Kerr, Rami Okasha and Fay Young. Contact details: Nick (0131 557 3904) and Fay: (0131 556 4646).

covered difficult ground.

Common themes flowed through workshops. The need to provide more opportunities for young people was a topic that cropped up in many groups. Physical safety was an issue for people of all ages – visible ethnic minorities feel more vulnerable in the streets and in their own homes since September 11 and July 7.

Frustration at wasted opportunities was voiced everywhere. Funding inequalities for multicultural arts events mean human talent cannot be exploited to the full. Many people said they want to see changes to benefits systems and immigration laws to enable skilled people to earn a living and contribute to the community they live in. Language barriers can be overcome through teaching but Scotland's ESOL funding is half that allocated per student in England.

Constructive solutions also emerged from every workshop. The Open Space event in itself was seen as an example of the benefit of bringing people together to share ideas. How about an Open Space event for young people, perhaps connected with the Mela, using arts, music and sport to engage the audience? How about producing positive role models from the Islamic community to counter negative misinformation in the media? How about promoting cultural festivals (such as the Mela) as national, Scottish events rather than festivals for minority communities?

Background

We decided it was time to do something after the London bombings, when people from so many different communities died and suffered together. Aware that violence and suffering is happening in many places across the world, we wanted to try to reach out and help to strengthen links between the many different communities in our own home area: the constituency of Edinburgh North and Leith.

We felt the simplest way to start was to try to bring people together to talk and listen to each other. An invitation was sent to as many different groups, organisations and

individuals as we could find – though the more we spoke to people the more we realised we needed to know what exactly is happening in our area.

The invitation asked questions about multicultural life in Leith.

- What is a real multicultural community?
- Do we want one?
- Do some minority communities have special issues?
- What kind of future do we want to build together?
- What actions need to be taken NOW?

Although the event was organised by a small group from Leith Walk Central branch of the Labour Party – and funded by the branch and constituency – it was not a party political event.

Malcolm Chisholm was there both as our elected representative in the Scottish Parliament and as Minister for Communities. Mark Lazarowicz was there as our Westminster MP. Both listened much more than they talked.

What is Open Space?

We chose Open Space as we believe it is the best method to encourage the kind of discussion we need. Open Space is not a talking shop; it enables people to find ways of turning words into actions. There is no agenda, no keynote speaker, and no panel of experts. Topics for discussion come from the floor, the big circle splits into smaller workshop groups then comes back together at the end of the day to vote on key points to take forward for action.

We are very grateful to Kerry Napuk, director of Open Futures Ltd who supported our idea from the beginning and guided

us through the process of choosing the theme and setting the context for discussion. We are indebted to Maggie Havergal, Open Space facilitator, who freely gave her time and skill to ensure the smooth running of a day's discussion.

Flip chart notes of action points provide a valuable record of workshop discussions and the final voting. More than that, they reflect deep concerns within our community.

What happens next?

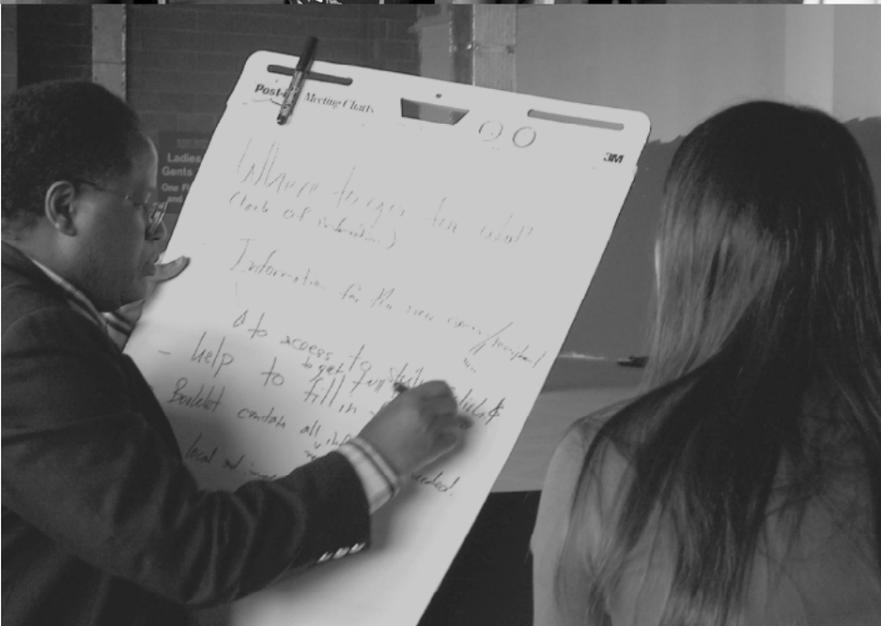
At the end of the day's discussion, most people in the closing circle said they wanted to come back again.

That is why we plan to hold another Open Space event within the next six months and would like to start by inviting you to sign up now. Potential topics include: how to make the media more positive, how to find role models, and how to set up a forum to develop multicultural opportunities.

If you want to explore how we can turn some of these key points into practical actions we would like to hear from you.

- Would you like to take part in another multicultural Open Space event?
- Can you help spread the word and increase participation?
- Which are the topics you want to turn into action?
- And please let us know whether you would prefer an event on a weekday or at the weekend?

Pictures: Nick Gardner



Workshop discussion notes and outcomes

Top six action priorities voted by participants

1. The media should be showing the positive images, not always the negative things and causing "scare-mongering" (18 votes)
2. Welcome immigrants to get "added value" (14 votes)
3. Fora and opportunities to develop relationships (12 votes)
4. Political parties to deliver on ethnic minority representation (10 votes)
- 5= POSITIVE role models from Islamic community (9 votes)
- 5= Looking out for each other. We have lost the neighbourhood support, the feeling of community support (9 votes)
6. Raise awareness among employers (public and private) of constructive competition within Scotland's society (8 votes)

Morning session: issues and actions

Group 1: Shamylla Identity crisis

Action point 1- A political voice / media integration (young people) (5 votes)

Action point 2 – Rise in opportunities promoting diversity
Action point 3 – Fora and opportunities to develop relationships (12 votes)

Group 2: Mrs Unis Funding equality for groups

Action point 1- Listening more to the voluntary sector; supporting them financially for the work they are doing (2 votes)

Action point 2 – Grants in proportion to the capability and delivery rather than the percentage of population (4 votes)

Action point 3 – Promoting cultural festivals as national (Scottish) events rather than minority communities' events (3 votes)

Action point 4 – Equality in funding nationally (UK) Less funding for Scotland for ESOL provision – half that compared to England per student (7 votes)

Action point 5 – "Holy days" "Optional holidays" If you have a religious day you should be able to celebrate that taking a days' leave or holiday, without losing a day's pay (1 vote)

Group 3: Habib Opportunities for young people

Action point 1- Open Space event for young people. Use role models, music, football, etc. "Mela" (5 votes)

Action point 2 – Make "structures" more long-term / flexible

Action point 3 – Be realistic and focus locally – on a theme (1 vote)

Group 4: Akhtar Barriers to integration

Action point 1- Free English lessons/courses should be made compulsory (5 votes)

Action point 2 – Raise awareness through good news about religion and remove fear of the unknown (4 votes)

Action point 3 – Change perceptions and stereotyping

Group 5: Nick Community planning / feedback

Action point 1- Spread the word (3 votes)

Action point 2 – Public health connections

Action point 3 – Answer this; how do we know we actually make a difference?

Group 6: Donat Constructive competition through multicultural

Action point 1- Learn through other countries' experience e.g. USA (1 votes)

Action point 2 – Welcome

immigrants to get “added value” (14 votes)

Action point 3 – Make benefits system easier to allow skilled people time to find jobs (1 votes)
Action point 4 – Raise awareness of employers (public and private) of constructive competition within Scotland’s society (8 votes)

Group 7: Naren
A political voice

Action point 1- Political parties to deliver on ethnic minority representation (10 votes)
Action point 2 – Within Councils, Scottish Exec, Westminster, trade unions etc., “equality units” need to re-prioritise race equality (2 votes)
Action point 3 – Reserved powers on race relations to be devolved to the Scottish Parliament (1 votes)

Group 8: Falmaya
Health and inequality

Action point 1- Monitor mainstreaming
Action point 2 – Monitoring charities – financial efficiency and outcome (2 votes)
Action point 3 – Audit service provision to BME related to health

Afternoon session:
issues and actions

Group 1: Jill
Not feeling safe

Action point 1- The media should be showing the positive images, not always the negative things and causing “scare-mongering” (18 votes)
Action point 2 – Increase confidence in community police – prioritise information about the work of community policing – neighbourhood response, environmental wardens, etc. (5 votes)
Action point 3 – Looking out for each other. We have lost the neighbourhood support, the feeling of community support. (9 votes)

Group 2: Akhtar
Where to go for what

Action point 1- Publicity materials i.e., booklets and good signposting (3 votes)
Action point 2 – Representative organisations

to help with filling forms
Action point 3 – Training in communication skills (6 votes)

Group 3: Mike
Rights we have in common

Action point 1- Renewed assurances (1 votes)
Action point 2 – Inclusion of human rights in school curriculum (4 votes)
Action point 3 – Facilitate contribution in society by raising more opportunities (1 votes)

Group 4: Mrs Unis
Speaking out

Action point 1- More POSITIVE role models from Islamic community (9 votes)
Action point 2 – We must all confront prejudice (3 votes)
Action point 3 – Support political leaders who speak out in support of all communities (based on consultation) (1 vote)

Group 5: Terry
Choices after leaving school

Action point 1- At school, break through existing barriers to increase aspiration and confidence. Careers-wide guidance – narrow and presumptive? Wider issues of PSE. Awareness of opportunities in employment and education. Young people/peers returning to share experiences = positive role models (1 vote)

Action point 2 – Experience in employment. Involvement of young workers and BME workers in trade

unions. Training and learning opportunities in employment (8 votes)

Action point 3 – Employers and institutions need to more than meet the statutory requirements; demonstrate business case for diversity then hopefully increase young people’s opportunities; overcome institutional discrimination either overt or hidden (3 votes)

Group 6: Kim
Representation of/by different communities and ages

Action point 1- Politicians to reach out more to diverse communities and prioritise young people’s issues (2 votes)
Action point 2 – Fund-holders and policy-makers to come direct to community rather than standard channels e.g. SCVO or VOS (poor record) Rigorous monitoring and evaluation of outcomes. Directly questioning the community. (4 votes)
Action point 3 – Acknowledge we are a racist society – highest echelons at senior policy-making and professional levels (3 votes)

(Only 6 groups were convened in the afternoon because of the need to share heaters!)

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