



Crime, order and social control

Police and the community

HOWAR:

My name is Howar Mangar and I am an Officer of the Commission for Racial Equality, seconded to the Home Office Specialist Support Unit, to help train police officers in race and community relations. My title at the Unit is Community Interface Director, and what that means is I'm responsible for all the contacts the Unit have with the different communities that make up multi-racial Britain. Officers come and spend six weeks with us to do a six-week course in race and community relations, and part of that course is a weekend spent in the whole of a black or Asian family.

DAVE:

My name is Dave Sherma and this is our third or fourth experience hosting police officers in the home.

STEVE:

My name is Steve McNally and I've been a police officer now for 19 years, and I've been a police sergeant for ten of those years, and at the moment I'm a training officer so I train police and civil staff at my police station.

DAVE:

Friday evening we kept for knowing each other, two or three hours talking about our family background and his family background, the hobbies, the cricket, the rugby, and all those things, was time when we were at peace with each other.

DAVE:

The family was invited to a Sikh wedding and I thought that would be wonderful idea to take our police officer with us so he could really see and join in the merry-making of the wedding.

DAVE:

I think this is a very traditional card. The family went to, I think the family went to India to buy this one.

STEVE:

So it wasn't made in this country then?

DAVE:

I don't think so. They do make beautiful cards over here but this is, this I think the family went to India and they bought it from there, and this is a very traditional picture in the front.

STEVE:

Does it all mean something, all this?

DAVE:

Well yes, yes because there is the girl in the front so that signifies it is the girl's father or girl's family is inviting us, so we would be representing the girl's family. Had it been a boy family then there would some sort of a male picture on the front, and she is in the traditional dress as you see.

STEVE:

And this is a temple?

DAVE:

No, this is a sort of a chair, a kind of a sedan chair.

DAVE:

We have been talking about different issues about customs, traditions, food, women, languages, and the people from Asia who has come over here, how much have they changed. And this weekend was the reality, whatever he has read or told, he put it into test. Social aspects and political aspects, and also discriminating factors, he was trying to find it out, and I thought knowing all these answers from me would give him a better insight when he gets another Asian person to deal with. I really thought my police officer in the end is a human being, and it is only their uniform which makes him so different. He feels more or less the same way as we do.

STEVE:

I believe it's a bit like your favourite book, you know you pick up your favourite book and read it time and time again, and you get an awful lot from it. But recently on this course I picked up that same book and I've suddenly realised there's another five or ten chapters that I've never read before, and that's put a whole new perspective to that book.

HOWAR MANGAR:

The officers who come on the course primarily should be trainers because the intention is that if they are trained in race and community relations they will go back to their respective forces and be able to cascade the training down from recruits all the way to inspectors.

STEVE:

I've only been in training a few months since February, so that's only about six months now, and I'll be doing that for about another two and a half years, and there could be another year on top of that, depending on the programmes that we're running at the time.

HOWAR MANGAR:

Now we have trained well over five hundred officers, and if we had those five hundred officers still in the field, I believed that we would be making progress, but unfortunately the way the police service is structured police officers cannot make a career in training. They have to go back to operational duties and quite often very, very good trainers are then lost to the service because they have to go back to operational duties if they wish to progress within the service.

V/O:

At the end of the weekend all the police officers and their host families meet and share their experiences.

HOWAR MANGAR:

Sort of weekend you've had, so perhaps if I could start with Mark – what sort of weekend was it for you?

MARK:

We had some very deep, meaningful discussions when things were relaxed, and had some very late nights. It was very enjoyable. Been to the Gurdwara this morning and I've been given my own Kara by the one of the leading people up at the temple. I'll wear that with pride and I'm sure that's going to cause some consternation with my senior officers. Apart from that I've had a fantastic weekend, couldn't have wished for more.

I was anxious that I wouldn't offend, that was my major worry. I was anxious that my lack of knowledge of different cultures would cause me to put my feet in the things.

I enjoyed going out shopping around the supermarket and it was me and Anjona, and the reaction of people to see a white bloke, Asian woman, I really enjoyed shocking, the shock on their face. I found her husband, Mitto, had a great interest in whisky and we spent many hours drinking, eating, and I really had an excellent weekend.

HOWAR MANGAR:

I hope you fit some discussions in in between. Mr Panchal?

MR PANCHAL:

I have to say two words as regards to my guest and we enjoyed nicely. Really speaking he was not my guest, but he stayed at my place just like one of the family members. Now this is a good link between police and people. It is thanks to you.

HOWAR MANGAR:

Thanks Mr Panchal. Peter?

PETER:

We constantly went to see various people, went to the temples, we saw all Mr Panchal's family which consists of 18 members, we saw several businesses, we went into Wellingborough town centre, but the emphasis must be on the way that I've been received into the community, it's absolutely exceptional, and I've learnt a lot from it, and I thank you.

HOWAR MANGAR:

Thanks Peter.

VAL:

We've had a good time, I hope she's enjoyed herself. We went to shopping Saturday and she said it was like sort of walking into another country, she's seen vegetables and fruits that she couldn't possibly recognise, and I think she liked perhaps West Indian food more than I do, so she's had a good time.

HOWAR MANGAR:

Thanks Val. Dalma?

DALMA:

I've had a great time, I've had a really good weekend. Val's black British so there wasn't really that much sort of cultural difference really. I sort of expected to go on a weekend and learn all sorts of new things about a completely different culture, and found that Val's got Sky TV and I've not, and that it's very difficult to buy make-up in the right shade for Val's skin, but apart from that really I found out that we're very similar. I've had a great time.

POLICE OFFICER:

Marks's got a fairly cosmopolitan set of friends so I got to meet people of different countries.

HOWAR MANGAR:

We've had officers who have been called names simply by walking down the street with a black family, and they are so surprised that some of their police training goes out the window, they even forget to take the number of the car as it drove past, which is everyday police training. And when they ask their hosts aren't you going to do anything about this? And they say what for? If we go to the police station it's more likely that we will be questioned about immigration, our immigration status, than wishing to deal with this issue.

MAN:

But all in all it's more or less the same as we've had before. The officers turn up there on a Friday and they're very apprehensive, and they go back on a Sunday finding that, you know, there's been no surprises at all apart from the colour of somebody's skin, there's not a lot else different in what goes on. Andy caught me on the hop actually; he asked me if I could stand up in front of police officers and say one thing, what would it be, and even though I was half asleep at the time, I think, all I'd say is the next time you go to approach a situation, whatever it is, is think hey, this isn't a black guy or an Indian or whatever, you know, he's just another person. Same as, I suppose, we'd have to look at it and say this isn't a uniform, it's another person underneath it, and if we can just go a little bit towards getting both sides to accept that these things do exist there, the whole weekend was worth it.

HOWAR MANGAR:

I believe that the work the Unit is doing is very important. I believe the Unit is under-resourced. We are told that this is a very important area in the work of the police service, yet

they cannot find an extra £150,000 a year to make sure that the work that we are doing is continued. I believe that we have made a good start but it appears that it's now going to taper off and for lack of funds, a programme that we know is successful may grind to a halt.