



## **Introduction to Working with Young People**

*The Project Co-ordinator's perspective*

**Andrew Lake is the Area co-ordinator for youth work across Loughborough, Charnwood and Melton Boroughs.**

### **Andrew**

The Factory project began life in about, just after the year 2000, it was a sort of millennium project. And it was started by myself and another colleague, who were aware that we weren't really meeting the needs of Bangladeshi young people. So, we actually went out on the streets and started to talk to young people. And the first group of young people, and the first group of young people we actually met was in a derelict factory. And we talked with them, and we went back the following week and talked with them again, trying to understand what the needs were for this type of youth work, it was going to be very much a street project.

They told us what they wanted from us and how they wanted it, how we had to adapt and improve what we did, as a service, as a youth service, so that we could better meet their needs.

**At the time, few young Bangladeshi men in Loughborough had been accessing the youth service.**

When we originally started, we started off with a very, very, very small budget, incredibly small, and just basically two of us, and we were both, like, white workers who aren't Moslem, which is a long way from the members who we were trying to meet the needs of. And we were very frank and said, you know, we don't have a lot of experience, we have limitations, so can you teach us about Islam? Can you teach us about being young and Asian? And about street life? Which they did.

**It became clear the project could also address a wider need in the profession itself.**

Our longer-term plan, in four, five years, was for the young people to become members of staff, because we advertised for, like, two years, and never got anybody applying for the work, to be an Asian street worker. Because we were specifically looking for someone who was a Bangladeshi street worker, and we couldn't get anyone. So, we did the best we could, and we've sort of grown our own workers now, because most of the project work is actually done by young Asian men themselves, and we sort of do more of an advisory capacity and help manage and train those workers.

### **Andrew**

And what else have we got planned?

### **Street Worker**

Just giving out the programmes.

**The two paid part-time workers are Kasem and Akkas.**

### **Andrew**

Kasem has done a Part-Time Workers' Certificate course through the county council, which has taught him how to be a youth worker, and that's done independently of us by County Hall, where we have a training department. He's worked with them and that's a one year training course, where he did a whole series of activities that were work focused, but also formalised, theoretical stuff, and he does that with trainers from other youth clubs, other workers, so, he learns from lots of different directions.

Akkas is just starting to go along that route, and he's starting to do part-time training courses and things like that, as well, to improve his skills, but a lot of their learning is around the coaching, the on-the-job, learning about the issues, learning how to manage them.

**The Factory Project now has over 100 members, aged from 11 to 25.**

A lot of our work is done in the 13 to 19-20 year old age range, about 80% of it, as part of our planning. So, you get very complex needs, 11 to 14 year olds want a lot of different things to the older ones. So, you have to change and adapt. So, 11 to 14 year olds were doing a lot of things that are around positive use of leisure time, having fun. When you get over 14, 15, you know, things are coming up, like relationships, employment, exams, and the pressures of adult life are starting to emerge and focus on you. And our key job is helping the transition to adulthood through those key years, so we come out with happier young people that are more positive, and know about how they fit into the wider world and, you know, and the community at large, and how they can help it.

**Today's membership goes beyond the original target group of young Bangladeshi men.**

The group is essentially very traditionally Moslem, as well. We do have some Hindus and that, as well, in the group. But it's not a religious project. We have Asian young people that aren't into any religion at all. It's a good mixture that does respect different cultures. So, when we do things like camping, we plan them carefully, so that we can respect as many cultures as possible. One of the camping trips we went on, we had nine different nationalities on it, nine different cultures. What a rich experience, fabulously rich experience. Very difficult, as a worker, to try to meet all those complex needs. Because we had, like, a Rastafarian, etc, you know, quite – it takes good planning and a lot of thought. And you have to know the young people, you have to know what they want to eat, whether they do prayers, you know, and you have to adapt your programme around those specific needs.

**Andrew**

What's happened?

**Group Member**

Nothing, I've not heard it yet.

**Andrew**

I think you will.

**It's part of The Factory philosophy that no-one is excluded.**

**Andrew**

Some of the friendship groups we work with on the streets, also have, within them, white young people and, you know, these are friendship groups that are very, very strong and very, very supportive to each other. If anyone comes up to us and wants to talk to us then we'll talk with them. We'll respect the diversity of the groups, as well, and the friendships that are important to young people. Often, the strongest support systems that young people have are each other.

**At the heart of the project lie the relationships between workers and young people.**

I think if all the activities weren't there and I didn't have a penny to do an activity, the relationships would still be there, and the work would still go on. You know, when we started the Factory Project up, we had £42 in the bank, that was it. And to set a project up on such a minimal amount of money. It didn't matter, because what the young people were wanting was talking, dialogue, a relationship, you know. And that doesn't cost a fortune, you know, it costs – it takes time, not money. It takes time and it takes thought and it takes consideration. And sometimes they take a few knocks, you know, but, hey, that's life.