



BUILDING BRIDGES

**A handbook for
bridging
communities through
creative
engagement**



Based on experiences running a pilot project
at the Bosco Centre in Bermondsey, London
2020-2021

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London Mayor's Office

INTRODUCTION AND RATIONALE



A shot from a Pan performance

This **handbook** is a stimulus for planning a creative arts project which is designed to bring together groups which may normally be antagonistic to each other.

Throughout the last decade, and perhaps particularly in the wake of the Brexit Referendum, there has been a rise in the tendency for refugees, asylum seekers and migrants to be seen as outsiders. In extreme circumstances they have been attacked and in one infamous case in Croydon a young asylum seeker who attended one of our projects was very seriously injured specifically for being a refugee.

INTRODUCTION AND RATIONALE

It is only recently that we felt the need to also work with members of the host community who may see them not so positively.

This handbook is based on a pilot project “**Building Bridges at Bosco**” which ran in 2020-2021. Two groups of young people (16-18), one of migrants and one from the “host community” worked separately but in parallel, near-identical programmes. Only when they had created artistic responses to the stimulus of “Us and Others” did the two groups meet and see each other and each other’s work.

We, with many other practitioners, believe that when potential antagonists can meet together and exchange views they almost always find that their commonalities are greater than their differences. Their shared humanity normally bonds them.



SUMMARY OF BUILDING BRIDGES AT BOSCO



Bosco Centre in Bermondsey is a small college with ESOL provision for migrants and educational provision mainly for those who have had difficulties in other schools. It is in an area which used to be dominated by the local docks and the housing was largely for dockworkers. The demographics have changed drastically over 3 generations. Unemployment has risen, new middle class “docklands” areas have developed and it is now as multi-ethnic and multi-faith as anywhere in London.

We were told that the Bosco Centre has seen many students from families where racist ideas were prevalent and this, alongside the migrant students, made it an ideal place for a pilot project.

Although our ideas in this handbook are drawn from this project it was far from a normal project and did not run according to plan. This was because funding dictated that it had to happen during a certain timeframe which coincided with the uncertainties of Covid-19, social distancing and three lockdowns.

SUMMARY OF BUILDING BRIDGES AT BOSCO

As a result:

- the start of the project was delayed by several months
- when it started the large hall where we would normally have worked had been taken over for extra classroom space and we had to work in a smaller space
- this smaller space meant smaller numbers of participants
- transfers of ESOL migrants to Bosco stalled because of the situation
- work had to respect social distancing
- the third Lockdown shifted most of the later sessions onto Microsoft Teams which was far from efficient
- the Digital Divide meant that many participants did not have devices to easily or consistently access remote sessions
- plans to present the results of the work to an audience were not possible and a streaming to other classes in the building was only partly successful.

This mix of circumstances, sometimes frustrating, led to new ways of working and new ideas which will form part of the following pages. It is partly based on what we did and partly about what we had originally planned to do.

PROJECT OVERVIEW

The Plan

- 1.** Two equal sized groups are gathered, one of young migrants, the other of “host community” youth. Each group works separately but through an identical programme of creative workshops (described below). As the groups establish their identity and start to create material in response to the commonly given theme, opportunities are found for the groups to share these. This could be by sending videos, by zoom link or, possibly, in person.
- 2.** As the work develops and each group consolidates its work an in-person meeting is arranged.
- 3.** In a common space the groups meet and present their creative results to each other. They then discuss their reactions to the other groups and analyse commonalities and differences.
- 4.** Using (mostly) the commonalities they have discovered the following joint sessions are dedicated to melding their work into a single whole.
- 5.** This is then presented to an audience of peers, parents, carers etc and spark a discussion around the issues.

PROJECT OVERVIEW

The Theme

Depending on the groups of people involved you can agree on a theme which will resonate with both of them.

For Building Bridges at Bosco we used the deliberately direct theme of “Me and Others”. This allowed everyone to reflect on matters of identity, starting with how they see themselves and progressing to how they see others and how they think others see them.

The Time Frame

We ran the Building Bridges at Bosco project over 16 sessions. This was considered to be sufficient time to develop and share ideas and it was viable within the available funding.

The aim was to run:

- 10 sessions separately for each group (20 sessions),
- 1 sharing session for both groups
- 3 sessions working with both groups to formulate a joint presentation
- 1 session presenting to friends, carers and peers with following Q&A
- 1 feedback session with both groups.

PROJECT OVERVIEW



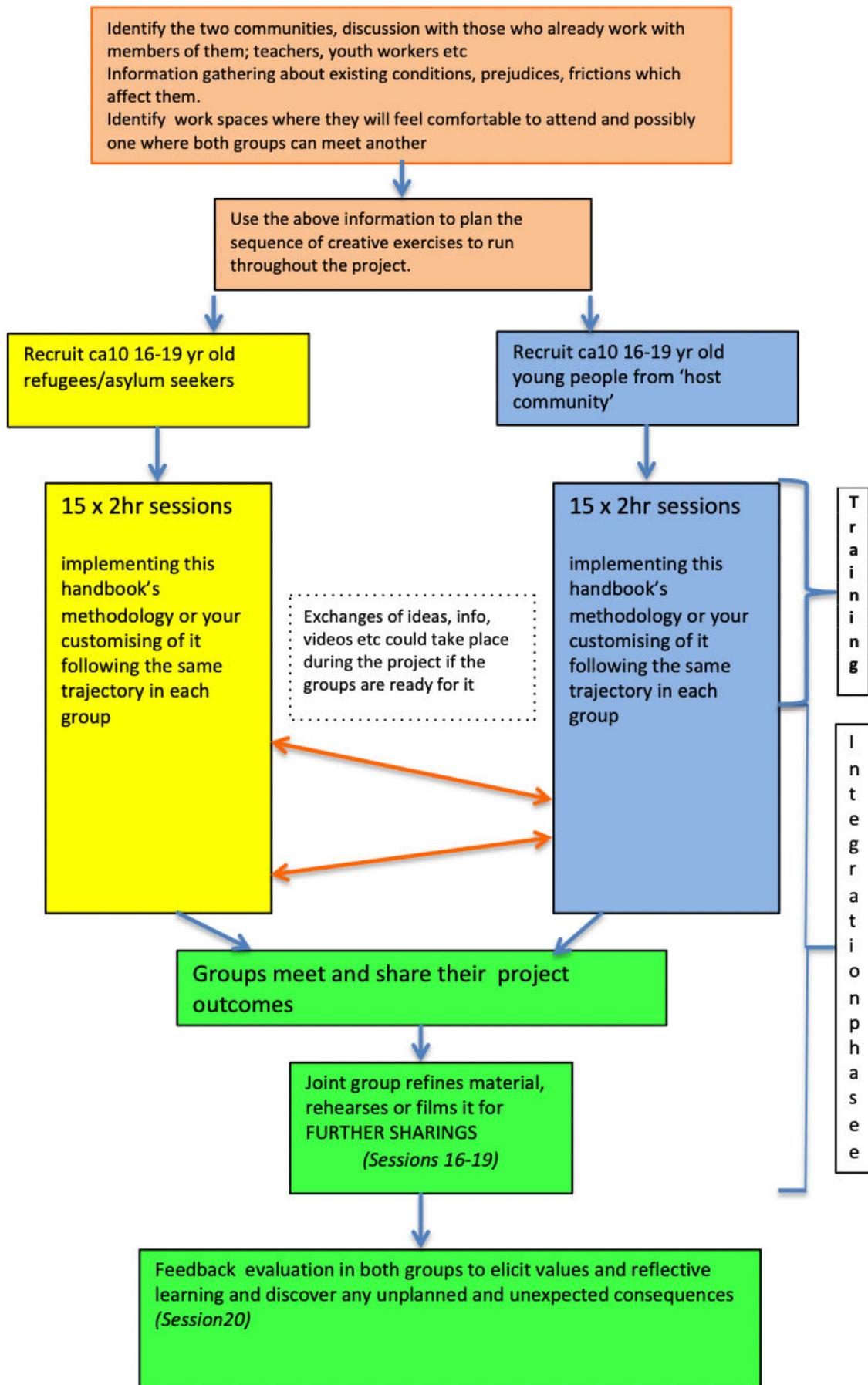
We still feel this would have worked but lockdown restrictions changed arrangements considerably, with self isolations, online sessions, bad connections, school closure at short notice etc and open presentations were impossible.

Because of these changes we were actually able to run:

- 13 sessions with each group (26 sessions, live or online)
- 1 session meeting and sharing material, both groups together (online)
- 1 session meeting live and streaming video material to others
- 1 session for each group for feedback

With hindsight we realise that different groups will need different amounts of time to respond to the stimuli but a slightly longer period would allow for this. We would now recommend spreading the project over 20 weeks as seen in the diagram below.

BUILDING BRIDGES, RESPECT AND UNDERSTANDING BETWEEN COMMUNITIES

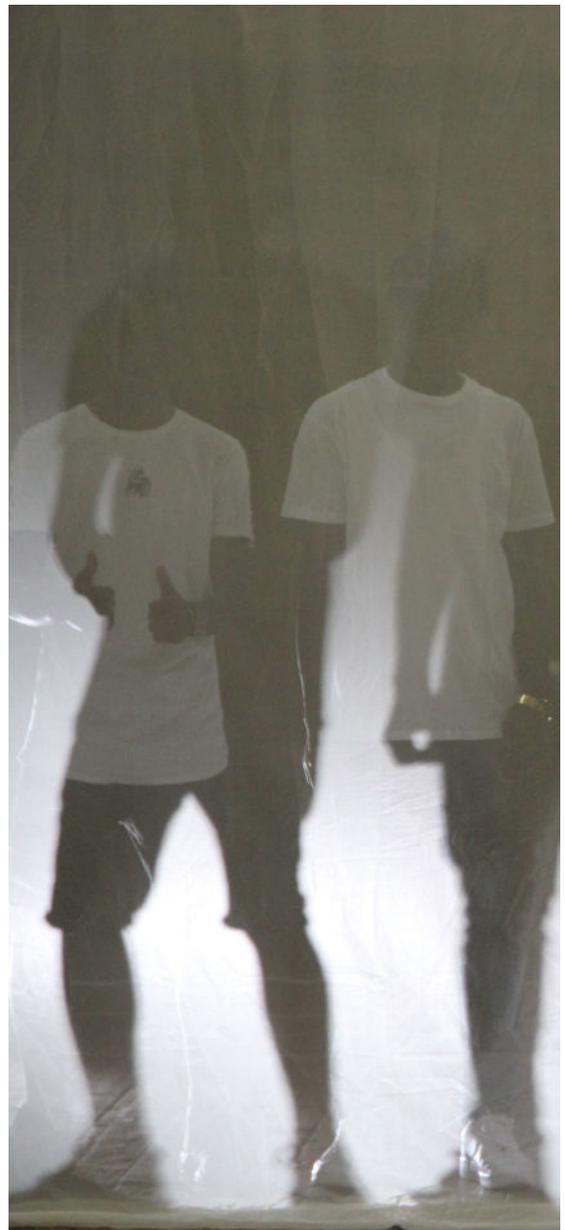


SUGGESTED PROGRAMME

These sessions are spread over the whole period. They are only suggestions and you may find that particular groups need more time on some topics and less on others. Each project will be different of course.

Introductory session

Use your favourite, tested, drama games to create a group dynamic and promote imaginative and creative ideas. This can include spontaneous games where participants start to show or tell something of themselves. (e.g. "If I were an animal I would be....", my favourite food is...." etc), as the project will be based on how they perceive themselves and others. The rest of the session can be dedicated to:



SUGGESTED PROGRAMME

- Defining yourself – How do you see yourself? We used a simple technique involving large sheets of paper, one per person. Each person strikes a pose (a physical shape) and a facilitator draws around it to leave an outline on the paper. Onto this shape the participants will draw or write the following;
 - Draw a heart where they think it should be.
 - Inside the whole shape they draw an image of what's inside them (a lightning strike, a tornado, a sun, a forest etc etc)
 - In the heart they write the things they really love
 - In the feet they write where they come from, where their roots are
 - In the head they write the things they think most about
 - In their fingers they write their good points, or skills they would like to have
 - In the space outside their body they write things which worry them, threaten them etc
- They then step back and see what they have created
- In pairs they introduce their "portrait" to each other
- Each participant presents their partner's portrait to the rest of the group.

SUGGESTED PROGRAMME

By doing this exercise, which can take an hour, everyone has made a statement about themselves and shared it. Participants can see commonalities, differences, surprising aspects and this has become the first "artwork".

Session Two

Session Two is dedicated to identifying who people are not. This is a further way of identifying themselves but also a beginning of looking at the "other".

The session can start with games to stimulate this. For example make a shape that you are not usually in, call out something you are not, "I am not a vegan", "I am not a sport fan" etc. There are hundreds of possibilities but it starts to paint the world around the participant, in which they position themselves by what they are and what they are not.

You could follow this with a discussion about people who are not like you. Who is the most unlike you? Who would be your opposite? Who is other?

SUGGESTED PROGRAMME

With this in mind an equal and opposite exercise to the one described above can be carried out:

- Draw a person outline on a large sheet of paper. This can be freestyle, not a line around yourself.
 - Draw a heart in the body
 - Draw lines and shapes which reflect their interior
 - Draw/write what they love in their hearts
 - Draw/write their thoughts, dreams and emotions in their heads
 - Their abilities in their hands
 - Their roots & inspirations in their feet
-
- Step back, take a look....
 - Present it to the rest of the group
 - For a short moment try to become (act out) the character, how is he/she different to you - enter, sit down and introduce yourself - think how is your body, your walk, your voice, your tension, different from your normal body?
-
- Discuss in the group what you learned about others, about yourself.

SUGGESTED PROGRAMME

Sessions 3 – 4

These sessions can be dedicated to using the knowledge of self and creating a piece of work about it.

The idea is for each participant to create a short (2-3 minute) vlog which introduces and positions them. Using phone cameras and introduced to simple free, in-phone editing software (we used VivaVideo), they use the session time and any time they wish to between sessions, they discuss possible shots, possible venues, whether to include shots of themselves and they try them out, self filming or filming each other.

Things to think about when shooting your video

- Who am I, how do I see myself, what defines me?
- My food, my friends, my hobbies, my habits, my street, my room, my music, my favourites, clothes, my moods etc. What do I want to show of these?
- How do I see others?
- Would you like to film in the same location and scenery each time (like a diary - signing in and signing out) or will your Vlog travel ?

SUGGESTED PROGRAMME

When filming your Vlogs think about what you are actually trying to get across. What would you like people to understand after they finished watching your Vlog story? Which emotions would you like the viewer/s to experience as they watch your story?

Simple ideas:

- Film a day in your life, for example 30 seconds every 2 hours
- Film a journey around your neighbourhood
- Film your journey into college

Ideally after the 2nd week a showing can be arranged.



SUGGESTED PROGRAMME

Sessions 5-6

In these sessions we attempt to elicit responses to aspects of their lives which can be drawn into a piece of text for them. Generating text can seem a mountain for participants, especially those for whom English is not their first language but this method will make their reflections into a piece of reflective narrative. You may need to write down their responses on post it notes so that they do not have the difficulty of spelling.

Of course you can vary the stimulus words used here but the suggested exercise includes:

- Pieces of flip chart paper with open sentences or questions on them are posted around the room.
- Participants go around the room and add their own sentence or answer to the question on post-it notes.
- Ask them to not look at others' responses, just focus on their own responses, beliefs and thoughts.

SUGGESTED PROGRAMME

These are the suggested stimuli:

- What do you think of the area you live in?
- Do you think your town has changed since your Grandparents were your age? If so, how?
- What does the word "suspicious" mean to you? Are there any people that you think are suspicious?
- What does the word "extremism" mean to you and who is an extremist?
- What do you think of people online who may try to recruit you?
- When you meet someone who is not like you, how do you feel?
- What is the biggest threat to peace in the UK?
- Complete the sentences:

Local people are.....

Foreign people are.....

My family is.....

My friends are

SUGGESTED PROGRAMME

Considerable help might be needed to ensure participants understand the words and the process. It was noteworthy that many of our participants did not understand the word “extremism” and we had to give examples they may have heard of, rather than explaining it to them (and thereby answering the question for them).

The collection of written reactions can then be a kind of word-source or word treasure chest from which to write about their surroundings. This is best done by asking them to read aloud their words and note down any associations, working with a partner or with a facilitator to make from these words a kind of poetic “personal statement” which both positions the author but also begins to reflect on their surroundings and their feelings towards others.

Depending on your participants’ ideas these pieces can be kept to be presented as a spoken word text, as a recording or as a voice-over to the vlog created in the previous sessions.

For many participants, especially those with poor English, this process can need a lot of work to find the correct dynamics and tone. It can be useful to play with repetition, rhythm, a second voice repeating certain phrases; anything to bring it to life.

SUGGESTED PROGRAMME

Sessions 7-8

Now that the participants are becoming more reflective and creative we can begin to think of how the relationship between self and other might be further explored.

Embodying the relationship is the first step to creating scenes in which prejudices, dislikes and suspicions about others can be enacted and reflected on.

Our facilitator started by creating simple physical images and then “freeze frames” inspired by stimulus words such as:

Happy, Love, Surprised, Lost, Disappointed, Confident, Shy, Suspicious, Myself, Others, Peaceful, Threatened, Family, Strange, Local, Foreign, Identity, Stereotype, Patriotic.

Firstly they work alone, creating a series of “statues” reacting to the words. Then they work in twos or threes, to find a physical shape for each of these stimuli, in which characters and situations will emerge and be recognisable from their experiences. A follow up discussion will capture these and decide which ones really speak to their own situations.

SUGGESTED PROGRAMME

Identifying the important ones, re-embodiment them, narrating them or bringing them to life in the style of image theatre, is the beginning of creating scenes about how they view others, what emotions are involved, how situations might play out etc.

These cameos shine a light into their existing or aspirational relationships. It is important to be observational and not critical of the scenes. These may be quite edgy scenes, but from their honest views. Only when fully developed can the critical debate around them develop.

Author's Note: it was at this stage in the process that our project was obliged to go online which made it impossible to develop these scenes in realistic situations. We would have liked to have built up a small repertoire of scenes which participants felt reflected how self and other featured in their lives. Instead, we turned to what was possible online which had some advantages and some losses



SUGGESTED PROGRAMME

Sessions 9-10 - Hate Speech

These sessions are a way of studying and understanding how certain individuals or organisations use speech to divide people by maligning particular groups within society. Participants may not have considered this before and may find the material difficult. However, ask them about people who have used racist speech and they will probably know quite a lot. They may well know names like Adolf Hitler, the Ku Klux Klan, Idi Amin, the Hutus against the Tutsis, South African Apartheid, Kim Jong Un, Donald Trump's anti Mexican speeches and many more.

It is worth quoting from these groups' speeches, or play recordings of them to start to understand how language is used.

The challenge then is for participants to work out how to create a short hate speech.

This can be done alone or in twos and will require time and thought. They may have realised that devices like accusing "other" groups of being less than human, or like animals etc. etc. are common and they may wish to build these in.

SUGGESTED PROGRAMME

Although this is, in a sense, an acting exercise, being someone they are not, there may be some hesitation in actually speaking some of the hate-filled language against others.

We found that participants found a very interesting way of dealing with this. Instead of naming real groups they substituted an imaginary, or metaphorical, group. So we experienced hate speeches against “all those who eat mushrooms”, “people who wear red”, “weevils” and many more. They grasped the structures very well and if you substituted (for example) Mexicans for Mushroom Eaters, or Christians, Muslims or Hindus for People who wear red, you hear a terrifying and resonant recognisable hate speech.

These will need some work, in the structuring and in the delivery but the exercise is valuable because it awakens participants to how extremists can use language to divide and fracture.

These speeches can be kept to be performed live, recorded on video or as an audio track for edited images.

SUGGESTED PROGRAMME

Sessions 11-12 - Unifying Speeches

After the stark reality of creating Hate Speeches this is an antidote and, in our experience, it is preferred by participants, probably because it has a positive ambition; living peacefully with others.

Again the session can start by tapping into the knowledge of the participants. Who do they know who has been a peacemaker, a unifier? In our experiences they will know some people like Martin Luther King, Nelson Mandela, Mahatma Gandhi, and even contemporary figures like John Boyega and Marcus Rashford.

Bob Marley was also suggested.

There are phrases in their (and others') speeches which are worth listening to from " I have a Dream" to "Rainbow Nation", "Out of Many One People" (Jamaican national motto) and more. There are plenty of examples available on the internet to inspire them.

Discuss how these orators have addressed problems and suggested alternatives and then...

SUGGESTED PROGRAMME

Set the task of writing a Unification Speech which is relevant to them, working alone or in pairs.

As above you can video or audio record these and these become part of their resulting creative responses which define them.

Sessions 13-14 - Refining the material

The participants have by now generated quite a lot of material; their vlogs, text positioning pieces, scenes from their image theatre work, hate speeches and unifying speeches.

With these as reference points each participant can now choose what they would like to refine, to re-work and to record. This can be the result of group discussion, small group breakouts and one-on-one work with facilitators. Depending on the number of participants and the time at your disposal you can choose which creations best represent the range of views.

Then participants can consider whether they want to:

- Rehearse to present live
- Rehearse and record – in which case where would they like to record, what setting, what kind of shot?
- Rehearse, record and edit with other visuals. If so, which ones?

SUGGESTED PROGRAMME

Although participants may not be used to making such decisions, try to give them open alternatives so that the final choices are theirs and not yours.

Session 15 – Choosing and rehearsing material

This is the last meeting in separate groups. Think back over the journey of how people see themselves, how they see others, how they recognise and present ideas of prejudice, extremism and unity.

Let the group decide how they would like present these ideas to others. Help them rehearse them to make them clear and understandable.

You may need microphones, video projectors, props etc.

SUGGESTED PROGRAMME

Session 16 – Joint sharing of projects

This is a special day. Groups which were identified and chosen because they are different and may have quite different experiences and views on life, now come into the same space.

Having people under the same roof may seem like a tricky moment but the likelihood is that they will recognise commonalities more than differences.

If you gently make the introductions and use their prepared materials (from Session 16) to speak for them then personal confrontation should not arise.

The presented material can be discussed and questions asked. It is a means of understanding others even if they are different views. Repeat that the other group has been through an identical series of sessions. They already have that in common which binds them. If viewed with respect they can learn a lot about each other.

SUGGESTED PROGRAMME

We like to eat together on occasions like this. Eating together is a great sharing and equaliser.

Author's note: we found that all participants, from both groups, were very moved by one recorded speech which illustrated how they had been treated by police. Everyone had similar experiences and this led to a heartfelt discussion about police-youth relations.

Sessions 17-18 - Joint group takes responsibility

As we reach this stage it is largely up to you to structure how it will proceed.

The goal is to work with the group to make a presentation of their different views and creative reactions so that they can show an invited audience.

It may be that they have created similar pieces, or that they all find one particular piece especially relevant or moving. They may want a narrator (or two) to introduce their ideas to the audience.

SUGGESTED PROGRAMME

What they will present will be a way of talking about Self and Other to others and asking their opinions. They may want to design the questions they will ask the audience, in reaction to the material they are deciding to show.

Of course you will try to keep approximately equivalent representation from each group and make it a celebration of all their work.

Session 19 – Sharing

This is their chance to own their work as a dual group and be proud of how they have developed their ideas. It is also a chance to show how much they have seen and heard the views of others and built a bridge to meet others and examine differences and commonalities.

Make the event as easy and comfortable as possible.

Let the participants run it as much as possible but be ready to steer the event if needed.

Make sure everyone is happy to be in the space and as well prepared as possible.

SUGGESTED PROGRAMME

Session 20 – Feedback and Evaluation

We went back into the two separate groups for this but you may prefer to have both groups together.

Now you know your participants you can determine the best way of eliciting feedback. It may be in one big circle, speaking one by one or it could be breaking into smaller groups and feeding back to the whole.

- What are we trying to find out?
- Did the presentation go well?
- Did the following Q&A bring up interesting ideas?
- What do they think of the journey they have made?
- Have they changed? How?
- How their co-participants changed and how?
- Do they now see themselves and others in a different way?

SUGGESTED PROGRAMME

Observe and listen and create a safe space for whatever they need to say. If conversation gets stuck in one area gently suggest moving it on. If someone is not being heard direct attention to them.

Try to avoid questionnaires or “easy” sliding scales. These do not measure change or provoke deep reflection. It is what they observe of their own journeys which will give you that.

Talk about how they can carry the discoveries they have made into their lives and relationships and make sure they feel proud of what they have done. This may have been the first time they have thought in this way.

“Nobody had ever asked us about what we think before, not deeply.” Participant in final feedback for Building Bridges at Bosco

CONTACTS

We would be happy to discuss this project with anyone who might like to develop something similar, or to undertake such a project for groups who might need it.

Please contact John Martin at j.martin@pan-arts.net for further information.

The author: John Martin is Pan's artistic director, a Visiting Professor at Rose Bruford College of Performance and an Associate Lecturer at London College of Communications.

The Facilitators: Shanti Sarkar and Emmanuel Alisigwe are part of the Pan pool of artists and lead several creative projects for young people.

Learn more about Pan and its activities by visiting www.pan-arts.net

