

**Gloucestershire Hate Crime & Incident Awareness Day
27 February 2009**

Faith Workshop

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We discussed a number of issues in this workshop.

What is the nature of faith?

Developing an understanding that faith can be about a person's spiritual journey and can be described by people as having a belief or no belief. Faith is a journey where you may belong to a group or you may not, and that could be awakened or re-awakened by outside influences and that even if you belong to a particular faith you may hold differing views from that assumed by that group. Faith too, can be confused by other factors such as race, nation and culture, and we have to recognise the difference of these factors and faith.

The barriers of faith to community cohesion.

Discussions were around the fear that people of faith were taken as serious people and that discussion around faith could be perceived as being difficult and offensive. It was often seen that particular faiths could be difficult to be seen, while for others their dress code or life style might make it obvious. It was also noted that because many faiths teach tolerance this could be seen as giving others the opportunity to be offensive without any retaliation. Culture was seen as very often confused with faith and this leads to many forms of mis-information around what the faith is and how it is interpreted.

Also it was noted that any individual's understanding of the faith, and also the 'media's' understanding, does influence the way that any faith is perceived.

Another barrier was the way faith has been portrayed in recent events.

How can we break down some of these barriers?

Faiths often have a common ethical base and we should ensure that when we talk about faith we emphasis the similarities and not the differences. We should ensure that there are contacts with many faith groups so that not only do they support each other, but that they can be part of a conversation to promote better community cohesion. Community policing should recognise the variety of faith groups and use these groups to develop work within.

Input about faith and respect of faith groups needs to occur across all schools including infants and juniors.

What are the barriers to reporting incidents?

The question was asked about whether people wanted to report hate crimes. Many of these barriers were about the lack of faith in the police service, both with perceived fears of the police themselves, and who within the police do they report it to. The question was asked about whether we needed female officers for the women to report to. There was a conversation about how do some of the more vulnerable people within faith groups report crime, and if they do not report it directly to the police who within their faith group do they go to to get support.

There was also the issue around what is worth reporting, i.e. what level of abuse is serious. The comment was made that many groups did not want to highlight their group to the police because they did not want adverse publicity.

What do we need to do?

To continue the work to contact faith groups and to give them a voice, recognising that many groups have time pressures on them, but recognising the work that is being done by the various groups exemplified by the Jerusalem Peacemakers, which is working across cultural and faith groups on an external issue which enables people to meet and discuss theology is a non-threatening way.

To consider how and who we report hate crimes to within the police service and within the faith community.

To have an understanding at what level of hate crime for faith needs to be reported, and the need to protect faith groups when they report.