

# **Learning to live together**



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# **Learning to live together**

**Developing communities with dispersed  
refugee people seeking asylum**

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# Contents

<b>Acknowledgements</b>	vi
<b>1 Introduction and aims of the research</b>	1
Introduction	1
Definition of terms	1
Political context: legislating and challenging in public	2
Community cohesion: policy debate and evidence	4
Review of the evidence	9
Aims of the research	11
What interventions?	12
The approach and methods	13
<b>2 The places of dispersal and ideas of community</b>	18
Salford and Manchester	18
What sorts of communities do people feel they have?	21
<b>3 How do interventions help people to live together?</b>	26
<b>4 Views of community cohesion</b>	31
What are the limits of cohesion?	31
How do these views relate to government perspectives on cohesion?	41
<b>5 Conclusions and implications</b>	44
Introduction	44
Main findings	44
Implications	47
<b>References</b>	51

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# 1 Introduction and aims of the research

## Introduction

The research grew out of concern with the effects of forced dispersal that were brought to the attention of the recently constituted charity: Refugee and Asylum Seeker Participatory Action Research (RAPAR). This report examines the effects of three activities on the way people from a range of communities interact. The activities are: Salford and Manchester Community Networks, a women's project at Manchester Museum and Art Gallery and a footballer's group in Salford.

- Chapter 1 briefly reviews the political context, including legislation and government policy around immigration and dispersal. It then examines the evidence base about barriers to, and good practice around, community cohesion before describing the interventions.
- Chapter 2 describes the areas of Salford and Manchester, the research approach and methods, and the kind of communities people felt they had.
- Chapter 3 focuses on how the interventions helped communities to live together.
- Chapter 4 looks at people's views of 'cohesion' and focuses specifically on the constraints at community level.
- Chapter 5 summarises the main findings and implications.

## Definition of terms

Throughout this report, the phrase 'refugee people seeking asylum' is used to describe people who have come to this country in search of asylum. We offer this phrase to:

- foreground the fact that this group of people are simply that – people
- make explicit that, irrespective of where individual people may be in relation to their claims for asylum, they are all refugees
- create an alternative to 'asylum seeker', which has become an abusive and negative label within sections of the media (ICAR, 2004).

The phrase 'long-term resident' is used throughout to describe people who identify themselves as being from Manchester or Salford, or as having lived in Manchester or Salford long enough to think of themselves in this way. They may be from minority ethnic communities.

### **Political context: legislating and challenging in public**

Since forced dispersal took effect on 6 December 1999, both legislation and services relating to immigration and asylum have been ever shifting and heavily contested (Moran, 2003). Early indications of the impact of the initial legislative decision to impose residency restrictions on people seeking asylum (Immigration and Asylum Act 1999), including curfews, accommodation in designated hostels and 'clustering' around the country, precipitated the formation of RAPAR across Manchester, Salford and Trafford.

In this section, discussion is confined to legislation that has affected people's housing, benefits and employment rights. We consider the effect of legislation in practice and some wider indications of how government policy towards refugee people seeking asylum has been impacting on public perceptions of the phenomenon of asylum over the last five years (for a discussion of the direct effects of legislation see the section below on the evidence base).

The stated aim of dispersal was to relieve pressure on councils in key areas such as Dover and London by moving people to areas with housing to spare. These interim arrangements lasted until April 2000 at which time asylum in Britain became the responsibility of the National Asylum Support Service (NASS), which was set up to provide accommodation and/or subsistence payments to refugee people seeking asylum so that they could support themselves while waiting for a decision. NASS works at arm's length from the Home Office, but takes action under Home Office direction. In April 2000, under the 1999 Act, cash entitlement for people seeking asylum became limited to £10 per week and the remaining allowance was provided through vouchers that could be used at selected outlets.

In early 2001, the British Government declared its interest in EU member states supporting an overhaul of the 1951 UN Convention on Human Rights to agree a clearer definition of 'genuine' refugees and economic migrants (BBC News Online, 2001a). A heavily contested European study published by the Council of Europe Racism Commission in April of that year found that intolerance of refugees and people seeking asylum was particularly acute in the UK (BBC News Online, 2001b). By this time, an Oxfam-led, broad-based campaign against the vouchers system, launched at the time of their introduction, was gathering pace. Evidence was

developing, which demonstrated that the vouchers were problematic (Home Office, 2002a), publicly identifying people as seeking asylum and thereby leading to hostility towards them from other shoppers and shopkeepers (IPPR, 2003). The vouchers were eventually abolished in April 2002.

However, on 23 July 2002, the Government introduced legislation that prohibited refugee people seeking asylum from working or undertaking vocational training until they are given a positive decision on their asylum application. Previously, prohibition had lasted for only the first six months of any application ([www.refugee-legal.org.uk](http://www.refugee-legal.org.uk), 2001) and, in practice, refugee people seeking asylum who had work permission, and those whose applications subsequently failed, still had the option of working legally and thereby earning money to live.

By the end of 2002, the British Refugee Council was asserting in the Home Affairs Committee for the 2002–03 session that poverty was the prevailing context for the asylum-seeking community. Cash weekly allowances are paid to people seeking asylum in NASS accommodation at a rate of 70 per cent of basic income support rates for adults and 100 per cent for children. The British Refugee Council had found that, of the 40 organisations working with refugee people seeking asylum in England and Scotland, 85 per cent reported to the British Refugee Council that their clients experienced hunger (House of Commons, 2003, p. 4). They told the committee that, in addition:

... there are growing numbers of people not being removed, for a variety of reasons, but who are being thrust into absolute destitution.

(House of Commons, 2003, p. 52)

In early January 2003, the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act of 2002 introduced a further tranche of policy change. The establishment of accommodation centres in which people will/may be housed up to six months with health and education facilities on site – in effect the segregation of refugee people seeking asylum from the wider community – was allowed under the Act. In addition, the continuation of government support to refugee people seeking asylum living in the community became conditional on compliance with reporting requirements. NASS support was further limited by prohibiting people who could not prove that they had applied ‘as soon as reasonably practicable’ from making in-country applications for asylum. This introduced an additional layer of destitution into the immigration system (Refugee Council, 2004), which has been resisted and interrogated through a series of legal challenges that have been recently upheld in the Court of Appeal: on 21 May 2004, the Appeal Court ruled against the Home Secretary on the grounds that denying support was a breach of Article 3 of the Convention on Human Rights, which

states that no one should be subjected to 'inhuman or degrading treatment'. Currently, the Home Office intends to manage cases in line with the court ruling while they take an appeal to the House of Lords (Casciani, 2004).

It is illuminating to set this description of how the last five years of government policy on asylum matters has been realised and resisted beside indications of how, during the same time-frame, the population as a whole appears to have changed in its perceptions of refugee people seeking asylum. The percentage of people who feel that immigration is the most important issue facing Britain has increased from around 5 per cent up to 1997 to 34 per cent by 2003, ranking higher than crime and education as an issue of national importance (IPPR, 2003, p. 36; MORI, 2003). Regional differences in attitude have also emerged. A MORI/Migration Watch UK poll of people aged 15+ ( $n = 2,057$ ) conducted in January 2003 found that 22 per cent of people in the North West disagree that it is a good thing that Britain is a multi-cultural society, as compared with 5 per cent in London, and 62 per cent agree that Britain is losing its culture, compared with 41 per cent in London. Concentrating specifically on immigration and asylum issues, the same poll found that only 4 per cent of people canvassed in the North West felt that the Government had immigration under control (cf. 16 per cent in London), 6 per cent thought that the Government had asylum under control (cf. 15 per cent in London) and 34 per cent agreed with the statement 'I am unwilling to say what I really think about immigration in case I am seen as a racist'. Along with the North East, the North West region revealed the highest percentage of people in the country as a whole that are feeling constrained in articulating their views (MORI, 2003). The presentation concluded:

In regions where there are low penetrations of ethnic minority groups, there tends to be more concern about immigration and asylum issues – e.g. North East and South West. In other regions, where penetrations are still low, many of the ethnic minority groups tend to be isolated from neighbouring white communities e.g. in the North West.  
(MORI, 2003)

The policies and attitudes described above form the background to research on good practice and barriers to community cohesion. The move towards segregating refugee people seeking asylum from other sections of society is in stark contrast to the language of community cohesion. This is the focus of the following section.

### **Community cohesion: policy debate and evidence**

Our starting point is that meaningful and lasting relationships between communities are built only when all communities have a say about the terms on which they relate

to each other. In this overview, we look briefly at published research in England since 2000. We examine community cohesion as defined in government policy and guidance (see definition below). Our research took place in areas into which refugee people seeking asylum had been forcibly dispersed. However, our research and this brief review are not limited to refugee people seeking asylum but intentionally include people who describe themselves as long-term residents, as the cohesion agenda is designed for all sections of the community. Our research included people who came from longer established minority ethnic communities, some of whom were born in Salford or Manchester. It also included 'white' people from minority ethnic communities, for example Jewish or Irish people as well as communities of 'white' Salford-born residents who considered themselves 'English'.

Research and policy guidance around refugee communities is often included under other umbrellas such as 'integration', citizenship, regeneration, immigration and discrimination rather than cohesion, but we include references to these if they concern community relationships (see, for example, Home Office, 2000, 2001a, 2001b, 2002b, 2003a, 2003b, 2003c, 2003d, 2004a; Chartered Institute of Housing, 2003; Vantagepoint and Home Office, 2003). There is also a rapidly growing, unpublished 'grey' literature, carried out by a range of service providers, giving examples of good practice.

In 2001, The Cattle Report (Home Office 2001b) referred to the 'plethora' of programmes and initiatives in relation to community cohesion. Looking through the paper mountain of policies, programmes and guidance since this statement, the situation has not changed and arguably the mountain is getting higher. The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, the Home Office, the Local Government Association, the Inter-Faith Network and the Commission for Racial Equality have issued *Guidance on Community Cohesion* (ODPM *et al.*, 2002). They describe a cohesive community as one where:

- there is a common vision and a sense of belonging for all communities
- the diversity of people's backgrounds and circumstances are appreciated and positively valued
- those from different backgrounds have similar life opportunities
- strong and positive relationships are being developed between people from different backgrounds in the workplace, in schools and within neighbourhoods.

There is also good-practice guidance on community cohesion available from other sources, including the Pathfinder programme run by the Neighbourhood Renewal

Unit of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister and the Community Cohesion Unit of the Home Office, and from the Chartered Institute of Housing (Chartered Institute of Housing, 2003; Vantagepoint and Home Office, 2003). For example, the former guidance is structured around four challenges: engagement with leaders, working with the voluntary and community sector, communication and sustainability.

In *Building a Picture of Community Cohesion*, the Home Office Community Cohesion Unit (Home Office, 2003d) put forward ten nationally available indicators measuring improvements in community cohesion. The headline indicator is: 'The percentage of people who feel that their local area is a place where people from different backgrounds can get on well together'. Other indicators are grouped into the four aspects of cohesion given in *Guidance on Community Cohesion* (ODPM *et al.*, 2002). For example, the component that recognises the need to value the diversity of people's backgrounds and circumstances can be measured by the number of racial incidents recorded by the Home Office. There are a range of sources given for collecting all the information, including the Home Office Citizenship Survey and local area boost. There are also examples of community cohesion good practice. There is a separate section in the *Guidance* on 'asylum seekers', refugee and travelling communities.

At the European level, the European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE, 2001) has developed good-practice guides in relation to: housing, health, community and culture, education, vocational training and employment. They involve refugees themselves in the research. The guide puts forward good-practice examples developed with organisations for and of refugees, individual refugees, and public authorities at local, national and European levels. As such, the evidence base is much deeper than the *Guidance on Community Cohesion* (ODPM *et al.*, 2002). The ECRE community and culture guide (ECRE, 2001) is divided into different sections on good practice in relation to: initial adjustment when a refugee comes to live in a new society; community relations between refugees and the host society; enrichment activities; and empowerment promotion. Focusing on community relations and development, ECRE identifies good practice as involving:

- actions to reduce racial harassment and tensions
- actions to reduce racism among young people
- promotion of social and cultural interaction
- positive use of the mass media
- local community development.

Mestheneos and Ioannidi's (2002) research with refugees in 15 European Union member states was funded by the ECRE Task Force on Integration and found that there were three main obstacles to refugees' 'integration': racism and ignorance at both the individual and institutional level; enforced dependence and marginalisation of refugees in states with highly developed welfare systems; and the 'personalities' of refugees in their ability and wish to be accepted in the new host society. A large amount of research also exists nationally and internationally that supports the key role of language in 'integration' at both the individual and community level around the world (see, for example, Audit Commission, 2000; Demos, 2003; Alexander *et al.*, 2004; Spencer, 2004; University of Warsaw, 2004).

Research also points to the effects of government policy on community cohesion (see, for example, Bloch, 2000; Mestheneos and Ioannidi, 2002; Demos, 2003). Alice Bloch (2000) documents the effects for refugee people seeking asylum of restrictions on access to social housing, changes to the appeals systems, changes in employment policies, the voucher system and the restrictions on entitlements to social security benefits. She argues that restricting refugee people seeking asylum from economic life and welfare benefits makes it very difficult for them to participate in the life of the country, both structurally and emotionally. These policies appear to be working against community cohesion. Speakers from across the world in University of Warsaw (2004) pointed to different government measures that resulted in increased racism. The Parekh Report (Parekh, 2000) points to the importance of eliminating racism and reducing material inequalities in building and sustaining communities (see also Osmond and Mugaseth, 2004; Spencer, 2004). The Home Office consultation paper *Strength in Diversity* (Home Office, 2004a) and *The End of Parallel Lives?* (Home Office, 2004d) both recognise the importance of tackling racial discrimination and structural inequalities in any initiative concerned with community cohesion.

The Home Office has itself noted that:

The plethora of initiatives and programmes, with their baffling array of outcomes, boundaries, timescales and other conditions, seemed to ensure divisiveness and a perception of unfairness in virtually every section of the communities we visited.

(Home Office, 2001b)

Government policy separates communities of 'refugees' from 'asylum seekers'. For example, in *Strength in Diversity* (Home Office 2004a, p. 18) reference is made to the new integration strategy for refugees and the need for personalised programmes of support during the first crucial weeks after a person is granted refugee status.

However, as Liz Peretz (2002) argues, you cannot separate the needs of refugees from those of people seeking asylum – what happens to people before their claims are settled and what faces them in settlement are intimately connected. There appear to be tensions, therefore, not only between policies but also between communities who believe that others are receiving funding that they themselves are not getting. This is reflected in inaccurate media accounts of superior services and benefits for ‘asylum seekers’ while ‘locals’ receive poor or no services. Most recently, a study has found clear evidence of negative, unbalanced and inaccurate reporting being likely to promote fear and tension within communities across London (ICAR, 2004).

Researchers have pointed to the problems in using the popular concept of ‘social capital’ as a way of examining community relationships. In *The End of Parallel Lives?* (Home Office, 2004d), the concept of social capital is linked to community cohesion and defined as ‘the networks of voluntary association, whether through formal organisations or informal contacts, at a community level’ (p. 21). The concept has at its heart a concern with bonding within communities and bridging to other communities. The report refers to the role of policies from the Home Office’s Communities Group including the Active Communities Directorate, the Civic Renewal Unit and the Community Cohesion Unit in helping to build social capital. Reference is made to the fact that it is essential to:

... take the opportunity to ensure that all activities embed cross-cultural contact (or ‘bridging capital’) from the outset to ensure that understanding and tolerance is developed and that fear and ignorance is defeated.  
(Home Office, 2004d, p. 21)

Critical researchers suggest that there are problems in the way that the concept of social capital has been used as a cure all for community ills and argue that structural inequalities within and between communities cannot be ignored when discussing how communities interact (Edwards *et al.*, 2003). For example, Edwards *et al.* (2003) argue that, by focusing solely on social capital:

... it follows that inequalities are socially rather than economically or culturally produced. This legitimises a policy focus on individual or collective behaviour.  
(Edwards *et al.*, 2003, p. 9)

A recent poll of Muslims in Britain (*Guardian*, 2004) suggests that there appears to be a significant weakening of their desire to integrate, with many, for example, now wanting a Muslim school for their children. Reasons given for this include racism,

and discrimination in policies around terrorism and citizenship. Research based on the uncritical use of concepts that neglect the structural realities of people's lives serves to perpetuate the myth that the individual is in sole control of their life and can overcome hardship by effort of will alone.

Research also shows that people from different communities cannot come together if the terms are unequal and they have little control over their own lives (ECRE, 2001; Standing Conference for Community Development, 2001; Castles *et al.*, 2002; Mestheneos and Ioannidi, 2002; Chartered Institute of Housing, 2003; Demos, 2003; Perrons and Skyers, 2003). For example, ECRE (2001) states:

There appears to be widespread agreement amongst both local and refugee experts that one of the keys to successful integration for refugees lies in the development of their own capabilities to organise and make their own decisions. (ECRE, 2001, p. 37)

The thrust of such research is that capacity building within communities is necessary for successful intercommunity relationships. We now review current good-practice guidance with this research review in mind.

### Review of the evidence

In relation to good-practice guidance on community cohesion, we focus on the following issues.

- 1 There are no indications in published examples of 'good practice' about how initiatives are chosen and the examples themselves have rarely been evaluated.
- 2 There is often no indication of who is involved in establishing the yardsticks for good practice.
- 3 There is an assumption that there are homogeneous fixed communities that can be defined as cohesive or otherwise.

*Guidance on Community Cohesion* (ODPM *et al.*, 2002) gives good-practice examples but no indication of how these were chosen or who had been involved. Without evaluation it is difficult to make judgements about initiatives. Some of the examples read like minimum standards rather than good practice. Claiming good practice implies evaluation against specified criteria by a range of interested people. In *Integration: Mapping the Field*, Castles *et al.* (2002) comment that:

It is striking that we were not able to identify any UK-based research that focuses specifically on asylum seekers/refugees' attitudes towards integration and/or their vision about what constitutes 'successful' integration.

(Castles *et al.*, 2002, p. 158)

They stress a lack of participatory/social action research (p. 179) and a lack of research that focuses on the process of building bridges between refugees and established communities (p. 191). The Audit Commission (2000) also comments on poor information and lack of consultation about the needs of refugee people seeking asylum following dispersal. Moreover, there is a lack of research that looks at community cohesion from the perspectives of all communities. Research tends to focus on organisations representing refugees or people seeking asylum or 'host' communities, rarely involving all communities directly in the research.

In relation to the third point, Castles *et al.* (2002) raise important questions about definitions of integration and ask 'integration into what?', as there is no single homogeneous set of norms and values, and integration can take place at different levels, for example, employment, welfare and education, culture, identity and everyday forms of social interaction (p. 114). Recent research with minority ethnic groups in Manchester and London (Alexander *et al.*, 2004) questions the homogeneous definition of community used by service providers. The research included refugee people seeking asylum and points to divisions along language, gender, generational and political lines, whereas policy makers and service providers often assume undifferentiated homogenous communities (see also Audit Commission, 2000; Home Office, 2004b).

The Home Office (2004a) consultation paper *Strength in Diversity* recognises that communities can define themselves in ways that are exclusive and work to segregate people from different backgrounds. Researchers have also questioned the basis on which communities choose to engage with each other and whether place is the sole concern (Putnam, 1993; Forrest and Kearns, 1999; Goodhart, 2004). For example, in their review of social cohesion and neighbourhood regeneration, Forrest and Kearns suggest that:

There is a tension between those who seek diversity and difference as the essential ingredients of a vibrant community, and a view of cohesion and community that emphasises similarities of life stage, attitudes and circumstances.

(Forrest and Kearns, 1999, p. 13)

The tensions between different *place-* and *people-based* definitions of community in relation to social exclusion are not addressed in much guidance on good practice. Forrest and Kearns (1999) suggest that what is needed is a mixture of both place- and people-based policies. Chronically disadvantaged individuals and households are:

... increasingly trapped within or channelled into specific neighbourhoods. The spatial concentration of poor people is itself an important dimension of social exclusion.

(Forrest and Kearns, 1999, p. 1)

This review suggests that there is a wealth of knowledge about community relationships but that much of it remains at the local level and is not published (see also Spencer, 2004). Published advice itself is often not evaluated and rarely involves people from across the whole range of communities that live in an area. Overviews of projects that have helped people to live with others from different backgrounds suggest a great deal of evidence around barriers such as English language ability and recognition of structural inequalities within and across communities. In our research, we were concerned to include the views of people across the range of different communities on community cohesion. We now describe our research aims and approach before looking at what worked, or didn't work, in helping people involved in three activities to meet people from other communities.

### **Aims of the research**

Our research was set up to:

- make a contribution to the current debates about how to bring communities closer together
- explore whether facilities set up to be used by a range of communities are succeeding in providing public spaces where people from different cultural backgrounds can interact
- explore whether a participatory research method helps to widen the range of stakeholders contributing to debate in the area of community cohesion
- examine the experiences and understandings of refugee people seeking asylum and long-term residents about the use of local facilities and networks.

We start from the view that, to build cohesive communities, all stakeholders have to be involved from the outset. As we note in this chapter, our research builds on local views of what makes a cohesive community rather than starting from government definitions and understandings.

We now describe how we identified the interventions before exploring our approach and methods in more detail.

### **What interventions?**

One precondition for developing our participatory approach in this study was the capacity and willingness on the part of people to use the RAPAR network to engage in dialogue with people from different communities about the ideas for the study (RAPAR minutes and notes of meetings, 2002–03). Through this inclusive and transparent ground-level communication, both refugee people seeking asylum and long-term residents became involved in deciding about both the structure and content of the proposal including what specific interventions or activities should be assessed.

#### ***Salford and Manchester Community Networks***

Community Networks are facilitated by Community Pride and funded via the Community Empowerment Fund. Their purpose is to enable the development of 'community networks' that encourage the representation of local people and community and voluntary groups on the boards of Local Strategic Partnerships, and create mechanisms for their accountability to their communities.

The contract for Salford Community Network is held by Salford CVS, the local Council for Voluntary Service. The Salford Community Network is managed by Salford CVS and is accountable to the Government Office North West. It was launched in early 2002. It comprises nine part-time staff with particular responsibilities for the nine community committee areas of the city and the five special interest groups: black and ethnic minorities; faith groups; people with disabilities; asylum seekers; and the lesbian and gay communities. It also includes two full-time staff with management responsibilities.

Like Salford, Manchester Community Network is accountable to the Government Office North West, which appointed Voluntary Action Manchester alongside Community Pride and the Progress Trust to establish the processes and structures of the network. It comprises seven networks covering all the different areas of the city and another 22 networks that bring particular communities of interest together – an environmental group, a minority ethnic group, a faith communities group, etc.

Each of these networks has a 'link organisation' and they are gradually consolidating their communication and reporting systems to maximise their opportunities to exercise influence at the strategic partnership levels of the city.

### ***Footballers' group***

This is a sports group based at the Broughton Men's Health Club in Salford, which has been running since 2001. The community development workers involved in setting it up have been supported through a series of short-term funding streams. It holds regular, twice-weekly, year-round football matches and has occasional residential weekends involving both men who are refugees seeking asylum and men who are long-term residents. Several of the men also participate in another weekly football session in Manchester, which some of them have gradually built up and now lead.

### ***Manchester Museum and Art Gallery***

Manchester Museum and Art Gallery Women's Health and Well-being Project was run jointly by Manchester Museum and Manchester Art Gallery in collaboration with the Universities of Manchester and Salford and local people who were volunteers/workers in arts service delivery in both Manchester and Salford. The project ran from November 2002 to March 2003. Its overall aims included encouraging the well-being of refugee women and women in isolated communities using Manchester's cultural and learning institutions and networks, and developing sustainable cultural community participation and skills.

## **The approach and methods**

The joint approach to constructing the research proposal derives from our commitment to participatory research processes. This is a departure from much traditional research, which assumes that people who are not academic researchers can be involved only in certain aspects of the research process, and it has both advantages and disadvantages. In our study, eight people who are either long-term residents or refugees who have been seeking asylum themselves worked as community researchers.

### ***The research process***

Strategies for identifying people who could become the intervention-specific community researchers were explored with senior members of the respective agencies. Members used internal organisation meetings to offer this research

opportunity within their respective networks. Named people were then contacted, the purposes of the study explained and concerns explored.

The research group met for an ice-breaker session at the University during Ramadan. It began in the late afternoon with a meal prepared by RAPAR volunteers. Everyone shared aspects of their personal biographies; the team composition ranged from a grandfather who had lived in the locality for 25 years through to a young male refugee seeking asylum who had arrived in the country eight months ago.

The community researchers raised questions about the nature and extent of the workload and this led to a sharing of fears associated with making the commitment. They identified some correlations between the skills and abilities needed to do this research and other activities that they regularly conducted, e.g. creating databases to support the organisation of trips/meetings/celebrations involving similar numbers of people; demonstrating strong interpersonal skills with people in need of help and support; using computers to write letters on behalf of clients. Two researchers were concerned that any negative findings about the usefulness of their intervention might impact on their employment (they were part-time workers for the organisation that had developed their intervention). This opened out a discussion about the extent to which researchers who were not academically based could influence the content of the final report.

The group then began to discuss how to collect the data. This was aided by a template of topics that was amended by the team within the aims of the research. The time-frame for the study as a whole, and, specifically, when they would co-train, develop the questions and collect the data, was agreed. The discussion then went on to explore how researchers could access up to 20 people per intervention to create the data. For the football and Community Network interventions, for example, they identified imminent gatherings where they would be well placed to tell people about the study and invite participation. An initial assessment of the language groups associated with each activity and whether specific linguistic support during data collection was necessary was made.

There was then an exploration of the pros and cons of tape recording discussions. The consensus was reached that the trust that the researchers enjoyed within their communities made recording the discussions possible.

### ***The samples***

The samples were constructed as follows.

#### ***Football***

Three focus or discussion groups emerged.

- Six older men (age range 30–55), three of whom did not actually play any football but attended football sessions to talk together while the games took place and otherwise participated in social events organised through the club. They lived across Manchester and Salford, originated in Afghanistan, Iran or Russia and had citizenship status ranging from asylum seeker through to three years' Discretionary Leave to Remain. For this and the second group, the discussions were conducted in Persian.
- Nine younger men (age range 17–26), also living across Salford and Manchester, all from Afghanistan and all of whom played football. They had citizenship status ranging from seeking asylum for one year through to four years' Exceptional Leave to Remain.
- Three English people and two local Salford men who played football. The academic researchers conducted this group discussion.

#### ***Community Networks***

- *Salford Community Network*: the community researchers chose from a cross-section of ten to twelve people who they knew to have prior knowledge of the Community Network. This included: former Community Network workers; people aware of both Manchester and Salford's Community Networks and who had seen Community Networking in its country of origin, Brazil; people helped by the Community Network; and current workers inside the Community Network. They collected data through a combination of group discussions and single interviews with members of two families from Pakistan and Somalia who had experienced the Network. For the single interviews, they identified interpreters and divided the roles of questioner and note taker between themselves.
- *Manchester Community Network*: two groups were identified. The first comprised men and women from the Eritrean community who knew each other and had a mix of statuses ranging from no status to in process, claims received, or no decision. In this group, the community researcher would be supported by a

language leader who could also interpret between Tigrina and English and would note take. The second group comprised two male and three female workers from a range of statutory and voluntary organisations in the asylum field, all of which had used the Manchester Community Network in the context of their own work.

### ***Women's Project at Manchester Museum and Art Gallery***

Three discrete groups were identified. The first comprised eight women from Somalia who had been involved in the project. The discussion was held in Somali. A similar group discussion by five women from Afghanistan and Iran was held in Persian and, finally, a group of four female workers, all of whom had been involved in the intervention on behalf of either the Art Gallery or the Museum, agreed to participate in a group discussion. This discussion was in English.

### ***Procedures for data creation***

By this time, the team noted that their confidence was beginning to grow as they mapped out their individual plans for how to conduct their data-collection processes. All agreed that sharing food with the respondents was a good way to begin and that this would be the time to sort out signatories for consents and payment/costs. They found it helpful to think about the group discussion as a conversation and identified the importance of encouraging everybody to speak.

Having developed a shared understanding and consensus about how to structure and contextualise their respective discussions, the research team went on to explore and develop the topics. They identified a shared expectation that, once people were physically together and were being encouraged to discuss their views and experiences about learning how to live together, then they would be more likely to share the problems that they had had, or continued to have. The research team discussed ways of handling requests for help and offensive remarks. It went on to evolve the schedule of topics. Each discussion group lead was responsible for producing either an electronic or a hand-written English version of the tape-recorded transcript for circulation among the research team during sessions where the dataset would be collectively analysed.

### ***Collective data analysis***

The research team began the first analysis session by sharing their reflections about how they felt during data-creation, considering the extent to which their own feelings became implicated inside those processes. People who were themselves refugee people seeking asylum recalled feeling emotional because of having lived through the same (though not all) experiences themselves. These emotions resurfaced as

the analytic process began: 'Want[ing] to cry for the sense of loss that is recalled'. In one case, a family that had agreed to be interviewed for the Community Network intervention had vanished before the interview was conducted. This had created feelings of anger that were shared by the rest of the research team and, in one instance, led a researcher to feel physically sick.

With the extent of their emotional engagement in the process made explicit, the members of the team went on to individually read through each transcript and then share their perspectives about what each dataset told them, and what the data so far failed to illuminate about how each intervention related to learning how to live together. Those areas that were identified as having been underexplored within the actual discussions led the research group to construct additional probe questions tailored to each intervention, which were posed by individual researchers through follow-up face-to-face meetings with some respondents and/or telephone interviews.

At this stage, because of time constraints, the academic researchers had to conduct the rest of the analysis themselves. The draft report was sent out to all the researchers for comment and amendment prior to finalisation.

During this research, everyone was seen as an expert about their own experience, with skills and capacities, rather than as a subject with needs to be researched on by outsiders (for a further description of this approach, see Bennett and Roberts, 2004; Temple and Steele, 2004).

## 2 The places of dispersal and ideas of community

### Salford and Manchester

Salford is situated within Greater Manchester. The 2001 census gave the population as 216,103. Of this total, 96.1 per cent were 'white' compared to 90.9 per cent of the population of England. Compared with England as a whole, Salford has small populations of Asian or Asian British (1.4 per cent compared with 4.6 per cent), Indian (0.6 per cent compared with 2.1 per cent), Pakistani (0.4 per cent compared with 1.4 per cent), Bangladeshi (0.2 per cent compared with 0.6 per cent), or 'other Asian' people (0.2 per cent compared with 0.5 per cent). It also has a small black or black British population (0.2 per cent compared with 0.5 per cent). However, it has a larger white Irish population than England (1.8 per cent compared with 1.3 per cent). Also, it has one of the largest Orthodox Jewish populations outside of London.

In terms of overall deprivation, Salford is the twenty-first most deprived local authority (Salford City Council, 2004). In 2001, 3.8 per cent of Salford's population were unemployed compared to 3.4 per cent of the population of England. According to the 2000 Index of Deprivation, which is based on a wider range of data, Salford is the twenty-ninth most deprived local authority out of 354 in England in terms of income and the third worst in Greater Manchester out of ten local authorities.

Manchester has a revised population estimate of 418,600 (Manchester City Council, 2004) and ranks fourth in the Index of Deprivation. It has an unemployment figure of 5 per cent in 2001 compared to the figure for England of 3.4 per cent. Manchester has larger populations of people from minority ethnic groups than England as a whole. In the 2001 census, 81 per cent of people described themselves as 'white' compared to 90.9 per cent for England. Manchester has a large population of Asian or Asian British people (9.1 per cent compared to 4.6 per cent for England), people who describe themselves as Pakistani (5.9 per cent compared to 1.4 per cent), black or black British people (4.5 compared with 2.1 per cent) and Chinese or other ethnic groups (2.2 per cent compared with 0.9 per cent for England).

In both Salford and Manchester, 'hot-spot' areas of intense deprivation exist, as demonstrated by Table 1.

Our research included long-term residents who were very poor and who lived in the wards identified in Table 1, alongside refugee people seeking asylum.

### ***Immigration status and physical location statistics: some quality issues***

However, these statistics must be treated with caution. Manchester population estimates have been shown to have been undercounted by about 6.6 per cent (Manchester City Council, 2004). There is also an issue about how refugee people

**Table 1 Indicators of deprivation across Manchester and Salford ‘hot spot’ wards**

	Unemployed <sup>a</sup>		Receiving income support <sup>b</sup>	No formal qualifications <sup>c</sup>	No car in the household <sup>d</sup>
	Male	Female			
<i>Manchester</i>					
Ardwick	22.0	7.7	24.5	35.0	65.0
Benchill	12.0	4.7	29.0	51.3	56.3
Bradford	18.3	4.4	32.5	50.8	57.8
Harpurhey	16.1	6.3	36.7	51.5	61.3
Moss Side	16.9	6.3	27.7	36.0	63.3
Newton Heath	12.8	4.8	24.0	52.3	55.4
<i>Salford</i>					
Blackfriars	9.8	3.2	19.4	33.6	58.8
Broughton	13.1	4.5	27.5	47.0	59.3
Langworthy	11.3	3.0	24.3	45.2	59.1
Little Hulton	8.2	2.9	19.8	45.8	47.4
Ordsall	9.1	3.4	22.5	38.0	50.7
Pendleton	10.5	2.9	19.9	34.2	64.9

*Note: all figures expressed as per cent of ward population*

*a Source: NOMIS GMRESEARCH, www.healthprofile.org.uk*

*b Source: Department of Social Security, www.healthprofile.org.uk*

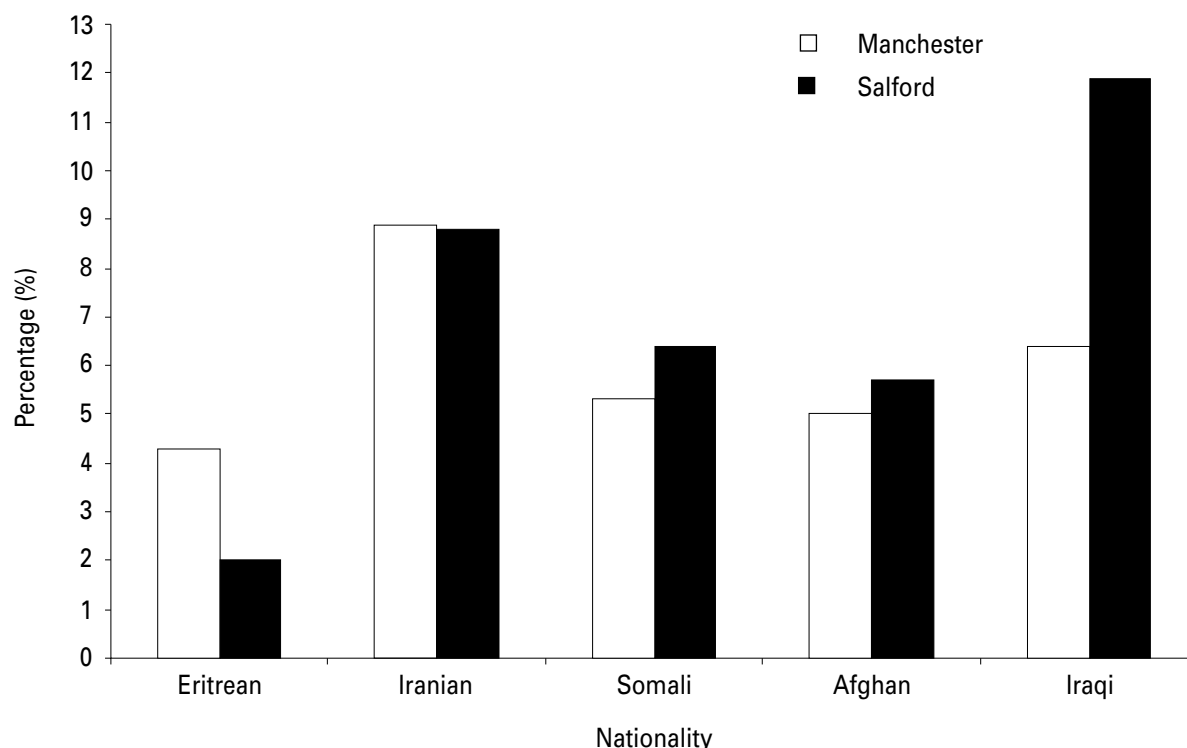
*c Source: 2001 census, Office for National Statistics, www.healthprofile.org.uk*

*d Source: 2001 census, Office for National Statistics, www.healthprofile.org.uk*

and people from Eastern European countries have been counted, as the classification is predominantly based on skin colour. People who come from Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan, Bosnia or Poland, for example, may have classified themselves as ‘white’ or ‘other’.

Estimates of numbers of refugee people seeking asylum are notoriously inaccurate. According to government statistics (Home Office, 2004b), applications for asylum in the UK peaked in 2002 with 84,130 applications, excluding dependants. In 2002, these included 1,180 from Eritrea, 2,630 from Iran, 6,540 from Somalia, 7,205 from Afghanistan and 14,570 from Iraq, the largest groups in our research. Nationally, of the 54,295 asylum applicants supported in NASS accommodation at the end of March 2003, 85 per cent lived in England and, of that number, 18 per cent (10,165) were in the North West (IPPR, 2003). More recently, as of March 2004, the number of people seeking asylum (including dependants) who were currently being supported in NASS accommodation was reported as 1,405 for Manchester (600 female and 805 male) and 960 for Salford (330 female and 630 male) (Home Office, 2004c). The breakdown according to the largest nationality groups that have participated in our research is shown in Figure 1.

**Percentage of people seeking asylum in NASS accommodation in Manchester and Salford by nationality as of March 2004**



Source: Home Office (2004c)

However, the Home Office was unable to provide the cumulative figures of how many people have been forcibly dispersed to Salford and to Manchester since dispersal began, as they only ‘periodically, publish a snapshot’ (Home Office, 2004c). Nor was it able to tell us how many people in Salford and Manchester had moved on from NASS accommodation and had either remained in or left the two cities, since dispersal began. This is because the Home Office does not produce detailed analysis of the numbers of people who have ceased to be provided with NASS support (termed ‘cessation’ by the Home Office) and so cannot provide a regional, nationality or gender breakdown, nor can it identify what the outcomes were of asylum cases that led to NASS support ceasing, i.e. whether people had been given refugee status or some other form of Leave to Remain and had remained in the area but not in NASS accommodation; or whether they had been refused asylum and had been evicted into destitution or hard case support. There are, however, ‘cessation’ figures for the whole of the UK that include both accommodation and subsistence support only being stopped. The most recent figure for ‘cessation’ is for 2003 when it stood at 45,120 nationally (Heath *et al.*, 2004, p. 18).

This lack of information compromises the abilities of service delivery organisations and systems across all sectors to accurately evaluate the extent and make-up of the different nationality groups that have been dispersed – and remain – in particular

areas. In turn, this undermines attempts to plan and deliver, never mind evaluate, any interventions that might prove helpful for people learning how to live together.

Now, having described the local context, we consider how people define their communities and, flowing from that, how they feel about the communities that they have and the communities that they want.

## What sorts of communities do people feel they have?

### *Defining communities*

People define community in different ways. They can belong to many internally differentiated communities at the same time. Alan from Salford Community Network described the difficulties in trying to define community:

I think it's demographic. I think it's age, class, gender, the main demographic boundaries, they're the ones that affect communities. I don't think they are fixed at a set, they can change depending on other external forces such as politics and so on and so forth. Communities are evolving and constantly redefining themselves and constantly changing themselves and it is hard to access it, judge it for a community at a specific time.

(Salford Community Network: workers' discussion group conducted in English)

This theme of flux, or constantly changing dynamics, inside and around communities runs through all our data, as does the contradiction or tension between bonding within communities and bridging out to others. John, a community development worker with Salford Community Network, explained how this contradiction grew out of some of the differences between how communities were defined around different criteria:

Faith is one of the communities of interest, we were quite interested in helping them, they wanted to know more about the Network and were happy with everything barring one of the communities of interest, they pointed out they were not happy with the gay and lesbian involvement. In fact they were happy for gays and lesbians to come to their church group as long as they realised they had the power to change.

(Salford Community Network: workers' discussion group conducted in English)

There is evident tension between the view in *The End of Parallel Lives?* (Home Office, 2004d) that activities funded under the umbrella of community cohesion should have cross-cultural contact built in from the outset and the views expressed in

our research that community cohesion is also about building communities internally. Since there were divisions within communities that needed to be addressed, people spoke about how the activities they became involved in helped them to strengthen bonds between people like themselves, rather than to build bridges to people from other backgrounds. Within communities defined around ethnicity, for example, there were gender and generational tensions that people felt needed to be worked on to keep their communities going.

When an Afghan footballer was asked about the 'we' he referred to when talking about community, he said:

Anyone who comes to football from our country. We have not seen the bigger community yet.

(Salford football group: players' discussion conducted in Persian)

In a follow-up discussion, he said:

I think people are living in different individual groups or races in this country. For example, Indian, Pakistani and ... They all live individually from each other and it is obvious the asylum seekers become an individual part as well.

(Salford football group: players' follow-up discussion conducted in Persian)

Other examples of non-place-based definitions of community relate to religion, immigration status and gender. Three case studies follow that demonstrate the significance of these characteristics of community.

### **Case study 1: Almas, from Eritrea, a single mother with four children**

At arrival, the key worker brought some milk, cornflakes, bread, tea and sugar and disappeared for three days, with no gas to cook. For three months we didn't have any idea of where we were, or even where was the city centre of Manchester. With all our housing problems we couldn't communicate with the landlords on the phone, which cost money. Even one day the TV started to smoke, we call the landlord and he came two days later. The house was leaking when it rained and we went to complain to Refugee Action. The only thing they could do, four years ago, was send a fax to NASS and tell us to wait – but NASS inspected my house two years later ... At the end of the day, Environmental Health from the City Council found out about the bad state of the house so they put pressure on the landlord who was obliged to do some repair.

*Continued*

When we arrived [*where we live now*] we went to the nearest church we found in our area. I am a Catholic but the church was Church of England. My children and I were well supported, it felt like a family. Because I felt comfortable, other friends joined and even my daughter got married within the church.

(Manchester Community Network: discussion group conducted in Tigrina)

This family began to experience positive forms of community only when they moved out of NASS accommodation, decided to reach out within their new locality and found an already established community-based religious network. They participated in the development of a bridge between themselves and a culturally different, but religiously similar, community. This bridge became so strong that they felt able to extend their view of family to people across the bridge and to support other members of their national grouping to further develop positive experiences of community by using the bridge themselves. Ultimately, this family's experience changed so much that they became able to actively celebrate a rite of passage, i.e. a marriage, within a community that comprises people of different national, religious and gender identities.

### **Case study 2: Hanida, from Eritrea, a single woman**

Some children attacked me so the police gave me a personal alarm. I lived with fear for two years until the landlord moved us [*two single women, one from Eritrea and one from Somalia*] from Manchester to Salford. Salford is a nice area, I became friends with the neighbours but, three-and-a-half years after, my asylum claim has been terminated so I had to leave my accommodation and so I am destitute. The Eritrean community in Manchester is well established. I am given help and support by friends who are Eritrean. When I received the letter I went for advice everywhere but no one had the power to do something. I filled in a hard case application and I am still waiting six months now for that to come through. All my friends are in NASS accommodation. They want to help me but they can't as much as they want to.

(Manchester Community Network: discussion group conducted in Tigrina)

In this example, a single woman had survived a long period during which her overriding feeling about her situation was fear, followed by another lengthy period during which she appeared to have created a bridge into the long-term resident community only to have that bridge broken by central government policy. The

eviction into destitution that she endured, and the corresponding change in her immigration status, had pushed her away from a transcultural and transnational community back into a community that is organised along national identity lines and on which this young woman became completely dependent.

Exclusion from the workplace curtails how much people move around and, as a consequence, become exposed to difference. For women particularly, their isolation is compounded through not having a means of breaking out of the domestic environment in ways that are considered to be acceptable both within the dominant sections of their own cultural groups and within communities that they want to be part of so that they can offer something to and take something from them.

### **Case study 3: Parvin, aged 35, a single mother with two children from Iran**

I used to live in Salford, now I live in Eccles. I had very difficult times when I was living in Salford ... when I met these people in this project I realised there were lots of people like me, even some of them from my country ... now we have people standing by our side and supporting us, making meetings and I feel very comfortable now. And because of that I recommend to all my friends to come to the meetings and parties. Especially women have to come to these kinds of meetings. We as women really need them to continue giving that support ... First thing is we women have to learn the language properly. It's impossible to call someone to interpret everything. Friends aren't always available to help you and it is difficult to find a woman interpreter.

(Manchester Museum and Art Gallery: discussion group conducted in Persian)

In this example, the key feature of positive community that this woman was experiencing and that contrasted so sharply with her prior experience was its gender identity. Sharing that identity with the other people from different nationalities inside this community was comfortable for this woman who, recognising that she was not alone with her problems, had developed levels of self-confidence and esteem and, crucially, English language competencies. Place-based definitions of community do not seem to feature heavily in these accounts. Perhaps this is because the people in this study who are refugees seeking asylum have, by definition, come to live in a place that is not of their choosing, where Place-based definitions of community do not seem to feature heavily in these accounts. Perhaps this is because the people in this study who are refugees seeking asylum have, by definition, come to live in a

place that is not of their choosing, where they have no prior bonds and where they do not necessarily assume that they are going to be welcome. For them, and also for the people who are already living in these places, the ways in which they think and talk about their communities are reminiscent of Dewey's (1933) notion of :

... sharing in each other's activities and in each other's experience because they have common ends and purposes.

(Dewey, 1933, p. 75)

These ways of thinking about community pose important challenges for policies relating to regeneration and community cohesion that build on from the assumption that place is always primary. Having said that, the ways that people describe what they have in their communities, what they want in their communities and how they experience the specific interventions being assessed, were premised on there being real spaces and real places where they could shape and influence their own learning and behaviours in relation to living with other people – albeit on a temporary basis and in contrast to much of their experience outside of the interventions.

In sum, people define communities using more than one criterion. Ethnicity, gender and religion, among other characteristics, are used and can all be significant. In Chapter 3, we discuss how people saw the activities or interventions designed to promote communities getting to know each other. Community in terms of the physical and social space to mix in safety with people from other backgrounds is crucial here. It enables people to move from individual contact to form communities that they feel have something to offer in exchanges with other communities.

### 3 How do interventions help people to live together?

As we discussed in the previous chapters, government policy towards refugee people seeking asylum maintains their isolation from the rest of society and breaks up their communities through dispersal. Their reconstitution in the setting they have been dispersed to is inhibited because of the:

- ways in which resource streams are defined (which tend to exclude 'asylum seekers' from cohesion and/or integration initiatives)
- hostile environments to which people are dispersed, which trap them in their own homes
- prohibition on work.

While arguing for the importance of social capital in community cohesion, for example in *The End of Parallel Lives?* (Home Office, 2004d), government policy has in effect led to the break-up of what it itself describes as important resources in achieving its aim. In our research we found that, before people could think about how communities could interact, they needed to rebuild broken networks. This was the case for all those who took part in the research, not just for refugee people seeking asylum. Building relationships began at the individual level and people felt there were tensions within 'communities' (see above) and between communities that meant it was too early to talk about communities mixing on an equal footing.

There is clear evidence that, at the individual level, the interventions have opened up opportunities for people to learn how to live together because they help people to overcome their isolation and to feel better through:

- sharing their problems and improving their well-being
- having something to focus on and to bring to relationships that gives them both a purpose for being together and something to communicate about.

We do not focus here on this individual level of well-being but on what the activities did to ameliorate the barriers that exist and that make it difficult for people to move from the individual to the collective level. All the activities were seen as crucial first steps for individuals and communities.

In this extract, high-quality interpersonal communication between this previously isolated family and a Community Network worker who has been able to develop

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## How do interventions help people to live together?

outreach work because of the resources that are available through the intervention is shown to be instrumental for developing collective opportunities:

When I was sent to Manchester I was very lonely because there aren't many Asians. Then one day Iram came to meet me, it was nice to see her and she told me about the Network and also about Salford link project. She said that if I need any help I should phone her ... the first time she took me to the general meeting, we met the people Iram works with and they are also very nice. The Asian lady from the English group is very friendly. If I see them on the precinct, I'd stop and talk with them. Before I didn't know them, Iram has taken me to one meeting where they talked about the faith network and it was nice to go and talk to people about the needs of Muslim children, getting some knowledge of Islam. (Parida, aged 45, from Pakistan Salford Community Network: one-to-one interview in Punjabi)

In the case of the football group, where the individual becomes better able to engage with people from different cultures and backgrounds inside of a range of different settings, this intervention is shown to create a change in feeling about the new society:

I try to get closer to way of living here. Using my free times, going to college, library, and doing sports, can help me so much. It'll make me feel close to the society and other people. And in sport like football, refugees can communicate with other people and make a good relationship with them. (Saleh, Salford football group: players' discussion group conducted in Persian)

In the following exchange, women from Somalia who participated in the Museum and Art Gallery initiative demonstrate that the intervention enabled them not only to break out of their prior individual isolation by giving them a reason to move around the city in order to get there, but also to make new communities for themselves that move across cultural and linguistic boundaries. The intervention is also implicated in the transformation of their perspectives about many national groupings other than their own and about the host communities:

- Parida:* I had always thought that people from this country were all racist horrible people. When you took us to the museum and we met those people it was nice to see that this country has some nice people.
- Community researcher:* What do you think you have learnt from the workshops at the museum?

- Ambro:* I learnt a lot of things from the museum. Every time I went it was something new and I got to learn about many different cultures that I did not know anything about. It gave us an experience to go out of the house and to learn something new.
- Saado:* The biggest advantage was learning that there are many people out there who are pleasant and nice. I always thought that all English people hated us but it showed that there are people who are happy to treat us with respect.
- Salna:* The workshops gave us a reason to come out of our houses, the only time I would leave home would be either to go food shopping or to pick up the children from school. The workshops were pleasant days out; if it wasn't for them I would just be sat at home.  
(Manchester Museum and Art Gallery: discussion group conducted in Somali)

Another example, this time from the Community Network intervention, demonstrates how interventions can be implicated in connecting people up with networks that, as well as transcending their nationality group, create links between their collective level network and other networks:

I met a lady waiting for the bus and later on I found out she was Eritrean. It was in a context with a lot of coincidence ... she had a lot of luggage and three children. She was given an address to go to and I had to help her with her luggage because she could not cope with all her stuff. She did not speak any English and I really assumed she was an asylum seeker. I just found out from the piece of paper she was given that she had to go to Oldham in a homeless hostel for mothers and children. The only help I could give her was physical and to put her on the right bus. Two minutes later I met [*the Community Network Worker*] and because I managed to take her phone number we called her and found out that she had just left her husband.

(Maria, a community relations worker who works with the Community Network and who is, herself, Romanian, Manchester Community Network: workers' discussion group conducted in English)

People participating in all of these interventions found them helpful, in the first instance, because they created the resources whereby a person would come and find them on an individual basis and introduce them to other, equally isolated people from within and beyond their own national grouping. They have gone on to find out about how to organise themselves into national identity groupings, creating internal

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## How do interventions help people to live together?

cohesion, as well as learning about other people. This has made it possible for groups to reach out to other groups, building bridges in the process.

However, the need to strengthen bonds with people like yourself may mean that active intervention is necessary to ensure that people from different communities get to know about each other. The organisers of the football said that people had tried to organise teams according to nationality and that they had had to intervene to encourage people to mix and, sometimes, individual workers and/or participants found it necessary to make an individual intervention that worked against the particular view of community that someone wanted to take at that time:

Then the Afghans wanted to play together. Normally there is no segregation but they wanted to form a team. We had to argue with them saying they shouldn't do it on their own, it should be everyone together ... We went to Eden for team building. Three or four Kurds and three or four Afghans.

(Waqas, aged 35, a community development worker born in the UK, Salford football group: workers' discussion conducted in English)

This is in contrast to the feelings in the Women's Museum and Art Gallery intervention where there was a desire to maintain a more multicultural sense of community:

We achieved a great deal ... because the first one we had two distinctive groups, the second one we were singing and dancing together and the third one I think they took that, it went off its own root then so to speak, but I think the second one where they sing and dance, talk and take notice of each other that was very important with different groups, not just a host group of people, but groups within groups. You know prejudice and dealing with labels can come into those groups themselves, I think that needs to be said, they overcame so much in the second one. We were upstairs in one of the rooms, we were two groups singing and we have something like chants and the ladies from Afghanistan started and the ladies from Somalia and Sudan were listening and then started singing and it was almost like we can do better, after that they all talked, after that they talked and it really worked.

(Sandra, aged 43, a worker at the museum, Manchester Museum and Art Gallery: workers' discussion group conducted in English)

The research therefore suggests that the activities are invaluable at the individual level and that work at this level is essential to building resources within communities and trust across communities. People described the activities as building blocks or steps for themselves but also for their communities and sometimes, as discussed by

the Museum workers and footballers, they needed active encouragement to move outside of networks they felt safe with. It is important to remember here that, because of dispersal policies, some refugee people seeking asylum had had their communities torn apart and that, for them, communities in the sense of established networks of support did not exist. The Afghan footballers, for example, constantly talked of community in terms of their football team since they had come to England with few family and friends. Ultimately, however, policies that result in the destitution of sections of society are absolutely excluding and divisive.

In the Manchester and Salford Community Networks, there is evidence that progress has been made in building relationships between communities. The evidence from the research – for example, the attempt quoted above to tackle the exclusive definition of community based on faith – suggests that strategies are being developed for ways of including different varieties of ‘community’ in debates about cohesion. However, within the study, neither of these networks has demonstrated the development of strategies for ensuring that they are inclusive in work with communities. Rather, engagement with the networks is highly dependent on singular social contacts. This raises questions about who sits at the table in discussions of community cohesion and whom they represent.

In the next chapter, we concentrate on understanding how constraints have created challenges inside the interventions and how people have responded to those challenges. In practice, these constraints work in tandem to systematically structure the way that people in communities do or do not learn about living together.

## 4 Views of community cohesion

In Chapter 3, we described what the interventions did to help people interact with other communities. We now examine the main constraints inhibiting people from being able to do this.

### **What are the limits of cohesion?**

In this section, we look at the extent to which people thought it was possible to mix with people from different backgrounds and the terms on which they wanted this to take place. We examine themes from the research around the effects of racism (and the influence of government policy on this), how people see their communities and the importance of language and resources for effective communication.

#### ***Racism, dependency and government policies***

The overarching theme throughout this research is the influence of racism on people's lives and the effects of this on relationships between groups of people. Hibo, a Somali woman in her forties, said in the Museum and Art Gallery discussion group:

I was returning from a study circle that I used to attend. As I turned into Green Avenue I saw a group of boys with the oldest one around the age of ten. As they noticed me they began to follow, they gathered stones and began to throw them at me ... I started to run away from them but that didn't stop them. They ran after me until I reached the main road ... After a while I changed study circles to a closer one to my home. I also took my children with me, one of whom is disabled and in a wheelchair ... The next day I saw them there waiting for me. Whenever they would notice me they started to throw stones at us ... I left my son's wheelchair outside the grounds of the centre. When we had finished I went out to get my son his wheelchair and I noticed it was missing. I saw them playing with it and it was broken into pieces ... At this point I was crying every day.

(Conducted in Somali)

She then described how her son was attacked and how she called the police who took a statement 'and nothing came of it'. She described another incident when she was coming from the mosque with other Somali women and how they were surrounded and then rescued by relatives. Sahra, a Somali woman in her thirties, followed this account up with her own experiences of being shouted at and slapped in the face.

There were many other such accounts and these experiences made people afraid of mixing with people from other backgrounds. Saleh was from Afghanistan and in his

late twenties. He had been granted Leave to Remain and was working. In the footballers' group he said:

There have always been problems between refugees and other people. I personally have seen lots of them, which has caused me to leave my house twice [*i.e. to move house*]. One day early in the morning, a car with some people inside stopped in front of my house, they smashed all the windows by throwing things and then they drove off ... These sorts of incidents happen a lot in Salford, which we just report to the police and the police have not helped us enough so we had to leave the house.

(Conducted in Persian)

Such experiences meant that people were more concerned about their safety than establishing contact with people from other communities. Their concern was to avoid meeting people who were likely to attack them. Alan, a worker at Salford Community Network, recognised the effects of racism on his work and was unsure about the extent to which things had improved in this country for any group that had traditionally been discriminated against:

I thought that certain barriers had been broken but if you look at it barriers don't actually get broken, they just get extended ... I think that's what happens in these things, I don't think barriers actually get broken, people just change the perception and people change the agenda slightly. I would be really happy if someone could say a social barrier has been broken in this country or any of the Western developed areas has been broken. There isn't, it has just been extended.

(Conducted in English)

He included women and minority ethnic communities generally when referring to his view that no barriers had been broken, they had merely been stretched slightly.

Examples of racism in football permeated the discussions with the footballers. Racism in football generally was acknowledged but specific examples were given from the football intervention. These included discussions about whether refugee people seeking asylum should be allowed to join in at all and comments about excessive force between players during matches.

Experiences of racism were compounded by government policies that were seen as marking groups of people out as inferior. Many of the accounts in the discussion groups and interviews were concerned with the fact that people seeking asylum felt they had lost even more control of their lives. Some could not work and had difficulty

with housing and with accessing services and getting information about their entitlements. Those people who had jobs were struggling on low wages:

Yes, there are many talented refugees who live in England and they experience different jobs, but unfortunately they don't have job permission. Even those who are allowed to work, they are asked to pay lots of taxes, which makes it difficult for them to afford it [*education*].

(Mehdi, 17 years old, with Leave to Remain and has been in the UK for two years, Salford football group: discussion conducted in Persian)

Similarly, Habib from Iran, who was in college, described in the footballers' group how they were caught in the black market or low-paid jobs that meant they had no time or money to pay for education. Taking away the right to work removed the financial means of mixing with other people in social events, as they could not afford it; it reinforced prejudices against refugee people seeking asylum and made them into dependants.

Nura was single and lived in Moston. She arrived in Manchester in 2000 from Eritrea. She was still awaiting a decision about her claim for asylum. In the Manchester Community Network discussion she told of problems she had with teenagers in the area. The police could not help. As well as putting up with this racism, she felt she was totally dependent on others, as she did not even know where the shops were to buy food. When she found the shops she was again marked as different, with no choice even over where to shop:

When we used to use vouchers, shopkeepers' faces changed each time we showed them, it was degrading and we were obliged to use them in certain shops ... By using vouchers we were seen as different or even less than animals.

(Manchester Community Network: discussion group conducted in Tigrina)

Almaz lived in Moston in Manchester with four children. She had been in Manchester since July 2000, when she came from Eritrea. She had never been interviewed about her asylum claim and was waiting for a decision to be made. She could be part of the Family Amnesty. Under this scheme, applicants who applied for asylum before 2 October 2000 and have at least one dependant aged under 18 (other than the spouse) in the UK on 2 October 2000 or 24 October 2003 may be granted indefinite leave to remain (Home Office, 2003e). In the Eritrean discussion group, she said that her situation had been similar to Nura's in that she did not know where the city centre was and had no gas for three days. Her house was in a bad state and she said that all that Refugee Action could do was send a fax to NASS who inspected the house two years later.

There was therefore a feeling that expecting people from different groups to mix together would not work while people from minority groups were marked as different and inferior by policies that took away the right to work and to receive benefits, the right to shelter for some and that replaced money with vouchers as the medium of exchange for certain groups. The role of the media in portraying some people as 'scroungers' led to tensions and misunderstandings when people who had been in the area longer did not understand that people seeking asylum were not allowed to work, a finding borne out by the ICAR (2004) study.

The ways in which groups were subject to racial abuse and turned into dependants meant that the extent to which they wanted to mix with others was affected. It also meant that the ways in which they could mix were limited if they could not work. The racism people experienced framed the way they could, or wanted to, meet people from different backgrounds and these themes of racism and dependency were seen as marking their inferior status. This meant people felt safer mixing with people from similar backgrounds.

### ***How people see their communities***

In Chapter 3, we discussed the different ways in which it is possible to define 'community'. We questioned any straightforward definition based on belonging to one undifferentiated group or place. The lack of clarity around the term 'community' means that resources put into community cohesion may be used in ways that work to strengthen community defined on some criteria, such as ethnicity, while reinforcing segregation according to other definitions, for example, gender or religion. People can belong to different groups, some of which are place based, e.g. museum or sports club, and some of which are defined along other lines, such as ethnicity or gender. In the research, people defined communities in ways that differentiated groups within them and spoke of the need to strengthen communities internally. They questioned any undifferentiated definitions of community, either theirs or other people's. For example, Almaz from Eritrea questioned whether it was desirable to mix with some of the people in the areas they had been put into:

I am surrounded by drug users or alcohol and prostitutes so it's difficult to be closer to them.

(Manchester Community Network: discussion group conducted in Tigrina)

Other people also spoke of the cultural differences that made living with other people difficult. The importance of respect for others was a recurring theme in the discussion groups and interviews, with people saying that the longer established 'host' communities had different values and norms from the newer arrivals and that this made living together difficult. The importance of family and the need to keep their

own values and culture were stressed by Zara from Eritrea, a single mother with five children, who had been granted Indefinite Leave to Remain (ILR) through the Family Amnesty (Home Office, 2003e):

My worry now is how my children will behave because they are growing up within a society in which parents are not respected. We want them to grow free but we also want them to keep their identity.

(Manchester Community Network: discussion group conducted in Tigrina)

And again:

East and West are completely different ... Another thing, they hardly understand our feelings ... the freedom is incredible here and they don't listen to their parents. In our country we try to do as our parents say because they have experience and respect.

(Nassim from Afghanistan is 24, has been in the UK for three years, has four years' Exceptional Leave to Remain and is working with Salford football group: follow-up discussion conducted in Persian)

Sereo from Afghanistan said in the footballers' discussion group:

I think our culture is completely different from other cultures. I know people from my country who are very good players and had sports activities for ages in this country, but still do not have contact with other mates from different cultures.

(Salford football group: follow up discussion conducted in Persian)

When discussing mixing with other groups, Shanara, a young Asian woman working on a project and part of Salford Community Network, said:

But I go against that *[going out meeting people]*. I think you should stick with your own community. I would not like my daughter to be with a different community boy, for a start we have the language problem ... I would always say stay with your own community.

(Salford Community Network: workers' meeting conducted in English)

Margaret, a Salford Community Network organiser, said that the orthodox Jewish community did not encourage people to mix with people who had different values:

Our girls don't have that conflict *[of values]* with what goes on in the outside world because they have absolutely no contact with the outside world.

(Salford Community Network: workers' discussion group conducted in English)

There was a discussion in the Museum and Art Gallery workers' discussion group about the dangers of limiting involvement to activities within communities:

It was great [*in the 1970s and 1980s*] learning about Bangladeshi weddings, ways of eating and that was fine because I wanted to learn that ... but people in Burnley who should have been learning that didn't and then you have the problems you had a couple of years ago and I think all that straddling [*across communities*] would have helped. If you put a child in an infant school you would have all of that, you will mix people from different communities. Wherever they are from they will mix.

(Sandra, in her forties, an academic working for Manchester Museum: conducted in English)

They decided to avoid a 'culturally specific' project 'because you just repeat the isolation'.

Guidance on cohesion, and examples of good practice, rarely discusses the boundaries that divide communities. Since these boundaries are fluid and people can belong to more than one community, any fixed definition would be difficult. However, the very vagueness of the term 'community' means that people may see themselves as part of a community according to ethnicity but may still question whether this community includes women or different faiths. They may also see value in improving community cohesion within ethnic or religious communities in ways that exclude people from other backgrounds.

Those organising activities intended to provide opportunities for people to learn about each other need to consider who they are targeting. They also need to ask whether they have structures that create different pathways for people to be able to question both whether/how the intervention is open and welcoming to people like them, and how, in the case of the Community Networks, the representatives are accountable to the people they claim to represent.

### ***Language barriers***

In Chapter 1, we discussed the importance of language in helping people from different communities to get to know each other and interact. Recent research with people who need interpreters to help access health and social services has shown that there are many factors that mean that, although English language proficiency is recognised as important, achieving it is not straightforward (Alexander *et al.*, 2004). There is a shortage of English language classes in appropriate venues that take into account the childcare and employment needs of non-English speakers. People also

felt that, as migrants and refugee people seeking asylum, there were many stresses in their lives, including racism, poverty and concerns about their future in the country, which meant that learning to speak English was not the top priority.

In our research, many people spoke of the importance of being able to speak English in helping groups to learn more about each other. Maria, who arrived in England just before Christmas 2003 and lives with her sisters, said:

The only way out [*of having to rely on others*] is to learn the language, which I did and I am glad because now I express myself, share my opinions and understand my rights.

(Manchester Community Network: discussion group conducted in Tigrina)

The footballers' discussion groups had many references to the limitations of not being able to speak English well. Sereo, a 23-year-old football player, explained how learning English had helped him to develop friendships at college:

When I started in college first, I hardly could communicate with other people, but later on when I was able to speak English better I had a close friendship with all of my mates in our class and inside of the college.

(Salford football group: discussion group conducted in Persian)

And again:

I think English language is the problem for most refugees, but the solution to this problem needs longer time, like two years or more, but still we can join other people in public activities in English society.

(Zia, Salford football group: discussion group conducted in Persian)

Saado was in her forties and was from Somalia. She said that speaking English meant that she now knew her rights. Learning English was a way of regaining control of her life. Other people in the Museum and Art Gallery workers' discussion spoke of the need to learn English. There was also discussion within the Salford Community Network discussion groups of the value of English language ability and Shanara from Bangladesh said: 'the only reason people from different communities don't live together is because of the language'.

This research confirms the findings of earlier studies that problems were caused by lack of English language classes (Griffiths, 2003; Alexander *et al.*, 2004). Pari was in her early thirties and came from Afghanistan. In the Museum discussion group, she said that she had applied to college months ago and had still not heard from them.

Other colleges were too far away and some of them were also full. Oleg from Russia had three years' Exceptional Leave to Remain and was not working. He had a wife and child and, in the Footballers' Group, spoke of his frustration about the lack of English language classes and described how he found somewhere to live but was not accepted because he could not speak to people:

I feel myself like a prisoner : I can't communicate with people. I have found somewhere to work, but they don't accept me, this is all because of my lack of ability in English. I have been to some colleges but they are saying that their classes are all full and asking me to pop in again in the next two or three months. This story has been continuing for a long time and the same answer.  
(Translated from Russian)

Family commitments, including the need to earn money, also often made it difficult to attend classes. For example, Parida from Pakistan described how she had had to stop going to English classes because her daughter was ill but said that she was going back because she realised how important it was to attend. Nassim was 24 and came from Afghanistan. He had been given Exceptional Leave to Remain and was working. In the footballer's discussion group he said:

Everyday it is getting harder and harder for us to live in this country. That is why I have to work full time and I don't have any spare time to do some studies.

In the Museum discussion group, there was some discussion about whether some language classes were appropriate, particularly for women. It was agreed that one of the colleges in Salford had a much better approach in that their circumstances were acknowledged as an important influence on their learning. For example, every two months somebody came to the group and asked about their problems at home and in the college. There were more Muslim teachers and students, and they understood their difficulties. Learning was not seen as something that could happen in a vacuum:

Well if you can't be comfortable at college you can't learn anything. My teacher at *[named college]* used to ask me why I am upset all the time. I told her I feel upset all the time because I am a refugee, I have a lot of problems to settle down. I mean she didn't understand what was going on outside of college. But now I can talk to somebody about problems and at least they listen.  
(Latife, aged 18, from Afghanistan)

There was also some discussion in the research about whether the best way to learn English was through attending classes. The activities that people took part in were seen as an important way of helping people to learn English, as it is easier to learn a

language when there is a purpose rather than just going to language classes:

... a few of the women have had bad experiences or perhaps have managed quite successfully with their own closeness and didn't feel the need [*to learn English*] ... There is a reason why you are learning to say something in English, because you got to speak to that person in English because if there isn't need I am not doing it.

(Sandra, Museum and Art Gallery: workers' discussion group conducted in English)

In the same discussion, Marie, an outreach worker for the Art Gallery, added:

When the women were showing off dancing to each other and somehow the language comes in on the back of it.

Parvin, an Iranian women in her thirties, described how going to language classes was not enough and spoke about how important taking part in activities was for women in particular:

But going to college is not enough. We have to go out more and talk to people, I mean practising. For men it is easy. You can find a job easily and learn the language quickly. But we Asian women can't do that.

(Museum and Art Gallery: discussion group conducted in Persian)

In one of the footballers' discussion groups, Bob from Refugee Action described football as 'a global language'. He felt that, if football were to be organised so that spoken English was kept simple, it could be a useful way for people to focus around an activity that could both help them learn about each other and improve the English where it was not a first language. He did, however, caution that this had to be actively managed so that people did not play in teams made up solely of people from their country and that racism in sport was acknowledged and tackled.

Our research suggests that everyone recognised the importance of being able to communicate in English. Many people were coping with racism, illness and stress because of uncertainty over their future. The lack of stability and security in the lives of people who spoke little or no English and the focus on immediate priorities such as safety, housing, money and health meant that the need to learn English could not be given top priority. The evidence for this runs throughout the research but the point is made most forcefully by looking at the examples above of racist incidents. They include the words of Hibo from Somalia. The incidents she was experiencing took place while she was attempting to attend a study circle, partly to improve her English.

### ***Resources and sustainability***

Whatever the activity, people spoke of the lack of resources and how this limited what they could do. The workers in the Networks discussed the restrictions imposed by short-term funding, relying on contract staff and, as one worker from the Salford Community Network described it, the 'low pain threshold' expected from people in the voluntary sector:

I think that's true of the voluntary sector in general, like at Community Pride's offices they are freezing, there is no hot water, it really is bad, there's no transport really anywhere, when we do reports for presentation they have to be of the same standard as the police or health services.

(Carol, Salford Community Network: workers' discussion group conducted in English)

The lack of resources meant that they were not able to plan for the long term and this kind of work was seen as needing a longer time-span. Waqas described the constant pressure of applying for funding for sports activities and how he 'couldn't concentrate' on his actual work. He felt that 'there wasn't much put behind these workers' in that the workers they employed were on low wages and working only limited hours, and this had an effect on their motivation. There were similar comments made in the Salford Community Network discussion group about the effects on motivation when contracts were about to finish.

The Museum and Art Gallery workers mentioned the resource-intensive nature of their work and how difficult it was to keep relationships going over a long period of time. In the Somali discussion group, Ajabo said that there had been many projects that had lasted only a few months and that making them more long term would help people learn more about others from different backgrounds. In a similar way, Jane, a researcher for Community Pride, and John, a community development worker with the Salford Community Network, talked about the impact of short-term funding in terms of the fact that, by the time you had got into your job, it was time to leave. John compared it to a business that 'takes time to get off the ground'. They also discussed the fact that 'money speaks':

It's about resources as well isn't it? You talk about the police and the health authority even if they haven't got the power to give loads of money because of restricted budgets, they have got significant budgets behind them but that's the reality of community.

(Carol, Salford Community Network: workers' discussion group conducted in English)

The Afghan footballers described how one of them used his own money to pay for the petrol to get his friends and himself to football practice and to matches. Sandra described her father's experience of the Museum as an expensive place to visit:

After the tour of seeing and looking at different things, he wanted to rest and have a cup of tea, he couldn't afford that, and he said he is not going back to that place any more.

(Sandra, Museum and Art Gallery: workers' discussion group conducted in English)

The lack of money to take part in activities and to run them therefore limited the extent to which people from different groups could meet.

### **How do these views relate to government perspectives on cohesion?**

In Chapter 3, we discussed how the activities provided opportunities for meeting others from different backgrounds and for learning about each other. They gave people something to talk about with others, something to contribute to and they allowed for some regaining of feelings of self-worth and control. They also enabled individuals to form groups to represent their views. The government aim of encouraging people from different communities to 'get on well together' had support from all the people we spoke to. To some extent, however, these people were already self-selected in that they were open-minded enough to come to activities that involved meeting people from different groups. The racists that many people in the research had come across were unlikely to have taken part.

As we discuss above, people tended to mix with others from similar backgrounds. They saw their own groups as fragmented on generational and gender lines, and did not see different groups as adequately defined solely on ethnic, or geographical, or religious lines. They felt that their own groups needed to be strengthened so that they had something to offer in exchanges with other communities. There is a tension between this view and that put forward in *The End of Parallel Lives?* (Home Office, 2004d), namely that all interventions funded under community cohesion should have cross-cultural mixing built in at the outset. This tension is partly a result of the vague nature of the term 'community'. The people in our research did not define community in ways that were limited to place or ethnicity and they felt the need to weaken divisions within existing communities.

When asked about how far different cultures should mix, an Afghan man said that this was 'just until there is enough of a relationship for them to be able to help each

other'. Relationships with people from other backgrounds in this discussion group were seen as an 'imagining of different races' that did not exist yet but that it was valuable to aim for. Alan from Salford Community Network described how valuable the goal of improving the way people lived together was, however far from the ideal the current situation was:

So, as I say, it is difficult to see how you will break down these barriers [*in relation to race*], it is always good to want to break down the barriers if you are always in a quest constantly trying to break down these barriers, not necessarily trying to achieve results, trying to get an end out of it, just a genuine want to make things better.

(Salford Community Network: workers' discussion group conducted in English)

Paul had been born and raised in Salford and had not met people from minority ethnic communities before he took part in football games and went on trips into the countryside. He suggested that there should be a different approach to integration and that it seemed to work when groups of people went away together. He asked 'Is there a space to do it here? I didn't get asked to Eid but I didn't invite anyone either.' The activities formed a space for them to feel safe and mix with others. The research suggests that space for learning about others is invaluable.

The government indicators of 'cohesion' were seen as important, in particular those linked with indicators of racism, safety and equal life opportunities for everyone. However, while control of decision making in local areas was seen as important for people who were working through the two Community Networks, for people seeking asylum this was an unrealistic aim: they felt that recent government measures limiting where they could live (through forced dispersal), their right to benefits and to work, for example, meant they had little control over their own lives, let alone decisions in their locality. Such government policies appear to be working against 'community cohesion' in that they reinforce images of sections of society who are dependent 'scroungers' who need to be controlled. They also create tensions between groups who have been in areas for different lengths of time and are competing for resources.

Since the Government does not define 'getting on well together', and arguably it is not advisable or possible to be so prescriptive, it can cover a range of different definitions. The meaning for people within this research has grown out of the experiences of racism and discrimination, and 'getting on well with others' was defined at the basic level of living peacefully in a way that enabled everyone to continue following their own values and beliefs. This fits the view put forward in *The End of Parallel Lives?* (Home Office, 2004d), in which it is argued:

Community Cohesion needs to be 'mainstreamed' and much more closely linked to the racial equality agenda, which is still essential to tackle disadvantage. We need integration, but we also want each community to feel proud of its heritage and traditions – in other words we need a type of multi-culturalism in which everyone supports the values and laws of the nation, whilst keeping hold of their cultural identity.

(Home Office, 2004d, p. 8)

However, our research suggests that the issue is that people do not feel that they have a say in what those values are. The views expressed about the different values across communities and the desire not to take on values that are opposed to their own 'cultural identity' form the crux of the debate. This is not just in relation to minority ethnic communities: people from faith communities and Salford-born residents expressed concerns about prevailing ideas of the 'values' of the nation. Alan was born and grew up in Salford and questioned whose values society reflected. As a working-class man from Salford, he struggled to survive on a day-to-day basis and felt that the values that he had been taught were racist, and that there were gender and class divides in society. Establishing 'the values' of the nation in anything more than a general, human way may not be possible – or desirable.

# 5 Conclusions and implications

## Introduction

In this chapter, we draw together the findings from the research and the implications for policy and practice. These are based on views from people across a range of communities. They offer important challenges for both the future advancement of approaches to doing research with vulnerable populations and for cohesion-related policy and service/practice development.

## Main findings

### *The research process*

- 1 The participatory approach involving people from all communities who took part in the interventions strengthens and deepens the evidence base of the findings. Research that examines how communities live together needs to include all communities and not focus on just one group.
- 2 The approach encourages all stakeholders to become involved in defining the research concepts – here ‘living together’ and ‘community’ – rather than having the agenda set right from the beginning by one side.
- 3 The approach helped the community researchers to identify and overcome some of the barriers to developing their research skills.
- 4 The resource-intensive nature of the research meant that researchers from different communities could take only a limited part in the data analysis and no part at all in report writing. To participate actively in all stages of the research would need a much longer project. The amount of extra time needed to be able to analyse data and write a report in a more participatory way depends on the previous experience of the researchers involved. We estimate that, to work in this way, we would have needed to double the time it took to analyse the data. Enabling all the researchers to contribute to writing parts of the report would have taken even more time, as most of the researchers had little experience of writing in English or of writing a report for a research funder.
- 5 The approach aims to take on board the views of all researchers involved and, for our research, this meant that the methods used changed and multiple focus or discussion groups were held rather than a single event with breakout language-specific groups. The implications for the research were far reaching in terms of the time commitments of all involved. The flexibility of the approach we used is one of its advantages. It also makes it difficult to carry out the research in the way the researchers wanted within the timetable agreed in advance with the sponsor.

The ability to negotiate timetables and funding with the sponsor of the research is an essential component of this approach.

- 6 The researchers found that the transcription and translation of the data took far longer than anticipated and again stretched the timescale of the project. In order to ensure that data were comparable and contained sufficient detail across the discussion groups, some of the groups had to re-form to investigate comments made that needed clarification or more discussion.

### ***Views on the interventions***

- 1 Creating interventions where participation begins to confront individual isolation is a crucial starting point in a process of gradually developing cohesion within and across communities.
- 2 Activities are invaluable at the individual level. Work at this level is essential to building resources within communities and trust across communities. It is important to remember here that, because of forced dispersal policies, some refugee people seeking asylum have had their communities torn apart and so, for them, communities in the sense of established networks of support do not exist.
- 3 People benefited from taking part in a range of activities in many ways, for example, in terms of personal well-being, improving knowledge of different cultures and improving their English language ability.
- 4 People saw the value of meeting people from different backgrounds and the activities they took part in helped them to do this.
- 5 People enjoyed the chance to show that those from all communities had skills and something to offer other people. The activities provided a focus for conversation and a chance for participants to show themselves and their communities in a positive light when they met people from different communities. This helped people build up their own confidence and self-esteem.
- 6 Taking part in activities gave people a safe space in which to meet others like themselves and provided the bonding blocks vital for initiating community development. Even though most contact across the activities was with people who were like themselves, the activities provided a safe physical and emotional space in which to meet people who were 'different'. People from different backgrounds valued the fact that they could meet and take part in an activity in a place where they felt safe and then decide to meet outside of the activity.

- 7 Sometimes, as discussed by the Museum workers and footballers, they needed active encouragement to move outside of networks they felt safe with.

### ***Ideas about community cohesion***

- 1 People felt they belonged to more than one community and that each community was internally differentiated. People used various definitions of 'community', based, for example, on ethnicity, gender, religion and sexuality. The area people lived in or where they took part in social activities was not the sole criterion for defining community but played an important role in helping communities live together (see below).
- 2 There was a strong desire to maintain traditional cultures and values that were seen as marking communities off from one another and that defined the kind and extent of community cohesion.
- 3 People valued activities that worked to strengthen communities internally and helped to form a bridge towards other communities.
- 4 The activities helped people to feel that they had something to contribute to relationships between communities, for example, football skills or traditional foods or dancing.
- 5 Building relationships across communities was defined at the basic level of needing to live peacefully with other communities while holding on to your own values.
- 6 People identified the aims of the government community cohesion agenda as generally valuable.
- 7 The review of good practice around community cohesion suggests that the criteria for choosing examples are often not made explicit and the examples chosen have rarely been evaluated. Examples of 'good practice' could arguably be minimum standards of engagement with people rather than good practice.
- 8 Barriers to cohesion were identified as the following.
  - Racism, dependency and government policies
    - Feelings of loss of control over lives arose because many refugee people seeking asylum are not able to work legally, experience difficulty with housing and accessing services, and get inadequate information about their entitlements. Those people who had jobs were struggling on low wages.

- Taking away the right to work legally, both prohibited a critical opportunity for refugee people seeking asylum to meet different people and inhibited the financial means for mixing with other people in social events. This reinforced prejudices against refugee people seeking asylum and turned them into dependants.
- Policies leading to destitution, were seen as the ultimate form of exclusion from society and worked directly against the community cohesion agenda.
- How people saw their communities
  - People from different communities wanted to hold on to their values and beliefs, and not mix too closely with others they saw as living in ways they did not approve of. This was the case for religious communities as well as for those defined on ethnic lines.
- Language barriers
  - Everyone agreed that being able to speak English was important to help people learn about the country they had come to live in and its inhabitants.
  - Language barriers stopped people from getting to know others and getting work legally. People talked about lack of English language classes, lack of provision for childcare and the competing demands of surviving financially and emotionally in a new country, which left little or no room for effective English language learning.
- Resources and sustainability
  - A lack of resources to keep the interventions going meant that the little money that people had limited the activities they could take part in. The future for staff at the Community Networks was insecure and the resources available to them were very limited.

## Implications

Our research supports the view expressed in *The End of Parallel Lives?* (Home Office, 2004d) that community cohesion needs to be mainstreamed and more closely linked to the racial equality agenda. The view of cohesion that was expressed in that report, that ‘we need more integration, but we want each community to feel proud of its heritage and traditions – in other words we need a type of multi-culturalism in which everyone supports the values and laws of the nation, whilst keeping hold of their cultural identity’ (p. 8) is one that can be seen in the comments made by people who took part in our research. We also support the recommendation of this report

that 'every central government department sees community cohesion as a government priority and not "just a Home Office issue"' (Home Office, 2004d, p. 8).

However, we draw slightly different conclusions from those expressed in *The End of Parallel Lives?*. As discussed in Chapter 2, although our research acknowledges the value of cross-cultural contact, it suggests that people felt that there were divisions and bonds within communities that they wanted to work on, which would help them when it came to making bridges across to other communities. *The End of Parallel Lives?* recommends that all government funding streams should be 'proofed' against community cohesion objectives. Our research suggests that this must not be at the expense of ensuring all communities have the resources to stand on an equal footing. The activities promoted by the Community Networks described in our research, for example, were valued as a way of internally strengthening existing communities. This was seen as a necessary first step towards making a bridge to other communities.

We found that some government policies work to stigmatise and separate communities rather than enabling them to live and mix together. For example, policies such as the prohibition on working by refugee people seeking asylum, their segregation from the wider community and the levels of destitution that result from the limiting of support from NASS under the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act of 2002 (see above) do not sit comfortably with the community cohesion agenda. The tension between community cohesion and policies such as the 2002 Act and forced dispersal is at its most acute when people can be cut off from their social networks, denied the right to work and made destitute.

Refugee people seeking asylum should have the right to work legally. Taking away the right to work legally:

- reduces opportunities for refugee people seeking asylum to mix with other people
- depresses local wage rates
- reinforces prejudices against refugee people seeking asylum
- forces refugee people seeking asylum into dependent roles.

Such government policies appear to be working against 'community cohesion' in that they reinforce images of sections of society who are dependent 'scroungers' who need to be controlled. They also create tensions between groups who have been in areas for different lengths of time and are competing for resources.

Adequate resourcing for areas that receive additional demands for services such as schools and housing is necessary whether there is a policy of forced dispersal or not. Otherwise, tensions between existing and new communities over resources result. In the field of regeneration, the Regeneration Practitioners Group that reported to the Community Cohesion Panel report *The End of Parallel Lives?* (Home Office, 2004d) recognised the importance of developing and delivering Area Based Initiatives in a way that ensured that relationships with communities that did not get funding would not be damaged.

The Community Cohesion Panel also makes clear that the benefits of inward migration should be promoted and the contribution to basic services such as the NHS needs to be better understood. This, we argue, cannot be done while sections of society are portrayed solely as a problem of growing numbers to be reduced. The term 'asylum seeker' has come to be associated exclusively with negative and very often distorted images of people in the media. Its systematic use feeds racist ideas. This necessitates the further development within the media of progressive initiatives that are seeking to apply language that consciously rehumanises dispersed populations. The establishment of Ofcom in January 2004 should be used to challenge inaccurate reports on any community. However, the effectiveness of 'guidance' to challenge inaccurate media images is open to doubt.

### ***Language policies***

Everyone in this study recognised the importance of being able to communicate in English. Many people were coping with racism, illness and stress because of uncertainty over their future. The lack of stability and security in the lives of people who spoke little or no English, and the focus on immediate priorities such as safety, housing, money and health meant that the need to learn could not be given top priority. The evidence for this claim runs throughout the research but the point is made most forcefully through the examples of racist incidents that occurred while people were attempting to improve their English. Similarly, people caught up in the illegal labour market or low-paid jobs had no time or money to pay for education. For all these reasons, the policy emphasis on English language acquisition as vital for citizenship and future cohesion must be accompanied by policies that remove the culture of fear and distress that is endemic to the lives of many refugee people seeking asylum and that compromises their abilities to learn.

People in our research who tried to take formal English language lessons found there was a shortage of classes, the classes were at times that made it difficult to attend and some questioned whether they were the best way to learn English. It is ironic that many saw the best ways to learn English as going to work and

undertaking training. Government policy has restricted both avenues to sections of the population and tied citizenship to language use (Crick, 2003) while classes are in short supply with long waiting lists.

### ***Representation within communities***

Engagement with networks that are intended to enhance community cohesion tends to be highly dependent on singular social contacts. This raises questions about who sits at the table in discussions of community cohesion and whom they represent, and necessitates the development of strategies for ensuring that everyone knows who represents whom and how they have been chosen. This means the following.

- Locating sufficient resources within community organisations for them to be able to get involved in strategic development over the long term. This includes payment for taking part in community consultations.
- Ensuring that there are structures that create different pathways for people to be able to question how interventions are run, who they are open to, how representatives have been chosen and how they are accountable to the people who they claim to represent. This may help move away from the use of vocal and committed 'community representatives' who have time to take part but have not been elected by anyone (Jan-Khan, 2003).

Since our approach to our research is participatory, we think it appropriate to finish with a recommendation that all communities should have an equal say in what they consider to be 'good practice' in community cohesion. Our review of the evidence suggests that examples are often chosen according to unspecified criteria and do not include any views about how practices work on the ground.

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