

Faith Junction



End of the final quarter report:

About the Faith Junction project -

Teams of two people from each major religion were trained in interview techniques to enable them to interview selected members of another faith, their question and answer sessions being videoed. The resulting recorded interviews were then professionally edited to produce a series of educational DVDs.

When we started the project in April 2006, Slough Faith Partnership, the local "official" interfaith group was about to cease operations. It had done the religious building visits and met Local Authority requirements, and attendances to meetings were falling off considerably. I had approached the Chairman with our Faith Junction project, and he had committed the Partnership to support it if funding arrived.

It is no exaggeration to say that Faith Junction saved the Faith Partnership. Suddenly, there was a committee to organize, and the committee had to get on and set the questions for the project. All taking part noticed that there was a buzz to these activities; people enjoyed the discussions, became really animated and enthusiastic for making the project work.



Showing the interviews over three hour sessions at Art Beyond Belief's new conference facility courtesy of Slough Race Equality Council. Those taking part could stay for the full session or come and go, giving a complete flexibility to the programme, acknowledging that people's time is precious. This has been an excellent policy - our fear was that people would show up for "their own" interview, and stay away from the others, but the surprise has been that people would stay as time, not content permitted, looking at whatever was showing during their stay.

Once the questions were set, the participants had to be found, and again, this was the work of the Faith Partnership. With a big list of doubters, 'don't knows', and 'might be interested', we started the training sessions. Immediately there was a polarisation; enthusiasts stayed, the others left.

During the summer we ran the training, and by autumn we were into the interviews themselves, finishing two days before Christmas. The most surprising outcome was the length of the average interview. We had expected to edit about one hour of footage down to about fifteen minutes of viewing time, but this has proved difficult. Many

interviews went to two hours and have been edited down to 35 minutes. This is due entirely to the enthusiasm of those taking part, who warmed to the task of explaining their faith to someone of a different faith. This has taken its toll of editing time, which has in fact almost doubled. It has also meant that we have had to purchase 2 TB of Hard Drive space for our Mac Pro computer which is used for video editing.

Outcomes have been entirely favourable. We have put a set of "experience feedback" interviews on our website www.art-beyond-belief.com and I urge people to take a peek at these short clips. The experiences show a remarkable degree of sophisticated



The complete set of twenty-four interviews are available from the beginning of May as an eight-DVD set. The interface chosen is bright and easily accessible, with chapter markers helping to identify the different questions.

engagement. Participants have seen clearly the differences between the Faith Junction interviews, and debate, where winning someone over to your own viewpoint (or demolishing their faith stance) was the goal. Listening seems to have been the surprise word; "As I listened I began to understand how somebody could hold this viewpoint", was a frequent comment. "I never had the opportunity to *listen* before" was another. Viewing sessions of the edited DVDs for those that took part and others are currently being held.

An entirely unexpected result of the project has been the provision of an office in Slough town centre shared with Slough Race Equality Council, with full use of their excellent conference facilities.

As far as data from the interviews is concerned, all faith participants were agreed that violence was wrong (although some allowed for self-defence), all favoured dialogue, and without exception all thought

that the other religions had a perfect right to exist. All participants said they had learned more of their own beliefs by questioning members of other faiths. Most were surprised at the reasonableness of their interviewees.

Those who took part in the training workshops exhibited a greater degree of professionalism during the interviews than those few who did not. Those who did attend remembered not to interrupt while their interviewee was talking, and not to grunt in agreement with views expressed. Those few who did not attend the workshops tended to interrupt and grunt, and consequently have made the editor a frustrated and sultry man, best not approached during the hours of daylight!

In summary, all our objectives have been achieved; we can add a big tick in the community cohesion box, as dinners have been shared, and there is a sense of particular camaraderie

among those who took part. Quotes from those taking part were included in our 3rd Quarter Report, and sum up a project that has been difficult to organize, moving in its application and brilliant in its end result. In the words of one of the interviewers "We have a message of hope to spread."

The task for the year ahead is to identify how that hope can be applied to tackling the problems facing both the faith communities and the nation at large. Race hate and religious intolerance are obvious subjects, but how to apply what we have learned is another matter.

We have applied for funding to set up a series of round-table discussions, at which key areas of concern to the Faith Junction participants - such as forgiveness, violence and media mis-information - will be discussed in detail. Three one-day conferences will then be held at which this informed, focused recommendation will be applied to the subject of radical extremism. The discussions are scheduled to take place in Autumn 2007, and the conferences in the first three months of 2008.



A finished Faith Junction DVD