

Equality and Human Rights Commission
Research report

Pilot evaluation
of Kumon Y'all
befriending
project

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Executive summary

This qualitative evaluation is part of an Equality and Human Rights Commission project that aims to 'lift the floor' on what works in tackling prejudice, discrimination, and identity-based violence and harassment in Britain by robustly evaluating promising interventions and improving the evidence base.

The evaluation tests the effectiveness of Kumon Y'all's befriending project, where a group of young Muslims have engaged with older non-Muslim residents in a community with which they would otherwise have very limited interaction. These include older people living in a residential complex and those involved in local clubs and associations in Thornhill, an area of Dewsbury with a predominantly White British population.

This small-scale evaluation has found evidence that community-based actions that bring together people from different faith and race groups can address misconceptions and begin to challenge prejudice. The Kumon Y'all befriending project directly addresses the social isolation many older people experience, and the active support from young Muslims living locally to the project in Savile Town, an area of Dewsbury, suggests that this model could easily be replicated in other locations. Even so, engaging and building trust with older people can take some time and durable outcomes may require extended support.

The 'low and slow' approach, which operates at grass-roots level and brings people together across different ages, faiths and cultures, was identified as effective among both groups in increasing understanding and knowledge of other cultures and beliefs and greater awareness of prejudices and misconceptions. These changes were more strongly felt among young people. While older residents were very positive about the young people themselves, some remained concerned about engagement with people from ethnic minorities in the wider community. Some saw limited opportunities to interact, constrained by language and some cultural practices.

The intervention provided a platform for participants to explore common interests and similarities in their beliefs and religion. Increasing prominence of positive intergroup contact (that is, contact between different groups) is crucial, and all

stakeholders involved in this evaluation maintained that the intervention should continue.

The findings of this evaluation are indicative, given the project's small scale, and further evaluation work and testing will be needed to understand the sustained impact of such interventions. Further research is also required to consider what the effects are in the longer term, and whether participants' changing attitudes make a difference to their interaction with family and wider social networks.

1 | Introduction

1.1 Background

Existing evidence (Scottish Government, 2015) suggests that despite good intentions, direct attempts at persuading people to recognise and change their prejudices and discriminatory behaviour have been largely ineffective and can often have unintentional negative effects. In contrast, interventions that facilitate positive intergroup contact (between different groups), or are based on principles of 'perspective-taking' or 'empathy-induction', are considered to be more effective (EHRC, 2016; Graf *et al.*, 2014; Dovidio *et al.*, 2011). There is also evidence to suggest that better results come from sustained activities over a period of time (Lemos and Crane, 2005).

A recent review of community cohesion in Britain for the UK Government (Casey, 2016) found that while segregation has reduced over the population as a whole, ethnic or migrant groups have become increasingly divided in a number of areas. This is particularly the case for people of Pakistani and Bangladeshi ethnicity, most of whom are Muslim.

In this context, 'what works' to tackle prejudice, discrimination and identity-based violence and harassment remains an open question. Identifying what works is the overall aim of our project. This evaluation looks at the innovative befriending approach adopted by a small local community organisation, Kumon Y'all. Kumon Y'all is a local community organisation based in Dewsbury, West Yorkshire, and was set up in 2008 with the goal to break down the racial and cultural divide between Muslims and non-Muslims. It aims to address racial hate and social injustice, and reduce the potential for radicalisation, through sustained positive intergroup contact in a community setting using the 'perspective-taking' principle¹.

In the mid-20th century, Dewsbury was a thriving market town with a predominantly White community. In less than 40 years, the town has become 44% Muslim (2011 Census) and, combined with a sustained decline in the local economy, this has

¹ Viewing a situation or understanding a concept from an alternate point of view

brought significant challenges. Dewsbury has achieved notoriety – the leader of the 7/7 bombers lived in Dewsbury (BBC News, 2005), as did the youngest convicted terrorist (Percival, 2008), and the youngest alleged suicide bomber (BBC News, 2015). There are now reports of a low level of social mixing between the Muslim and non-Muslim groups living in this area. Kumon Y'all is based in Savile Town, an area of Dewsbury with a predominantly (93%) Asian Muslim population (2011 Census).

Kumon Y'all has engaged with young people through word of mouth to encourage them to take part in community volunteering projects and actions in neighbourhoods with a predominantly White British population. The befriending project is only part of Kumon Y'all's activity, but one that lends itself to the timescale and resources for this research.

Although previous work has generated a 'theory of change' for Kumon Y'all², its impact on the initiative's aims has not yet been formally evaluated. This evaluation aimed to use this logical framework to provide clear evidence of the effect on both young and older people who have taken part in Kumon Y'all's befriending project and to identify what works at a local level.

² A comprehensive description of how and why change is expected to happen within the context of the initiative, developed as part of the West Yorkshire Racial Justice programme for Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust

2 | The intervention and planned outcomes

2.1 The intervention

This qualitative evaluation tests the effectiveness of Kumon Y'all's befriending project, where a group of young Muslims have engaged with older non-Muslim residents in a community with which they would otherwise have very limited interaction. These include older people living in a residential complex and those involved in local clubs and associations in Thornhill, an area of Dewsbury with a predominantly White British population.

Kumon Y'all believes that to break down prejudice it is necessary to work with young people, who have the energy and passion to make the world a better place. It engages with local young people through creative local volunteering projects and empowers them to identify and tackle problems and issues faced by the community. The Kumon Y'all befriending project started in 2013 and is ongoing. This evaluation focuses on the activity that took place over a three-year period up to autumn 2016.

During those three years the project involved a total of 200 young people in visits to two residential complexes for older people in Thornhill through a range of interventions – 20 in total. A core group of approximately 50 young people took part regularly (more than once), organising and participating in a number of activities over the three-year period. Young people met weekly in a community centre in Savile Town. They planned activities that were delivered in the Thornhill residential complexes and aimed at promoting social cohesion and tackling prejudice. There were approximately 50 residents living in the two complexes during this period.

At any one time a group of 10-15 young people at any one time delivered would be giving presentations on living peacefully and understanding each other, helping with gardening, and organising a Christmas party, games, and pampering and cake decorating sessions. The project also arranged a mosque visit and two sports events (boccia and curling tournaments) at the local high school, in which the older people from the residential complexes took part.

Kumon Y'all has provided other forms of support and activity in which the young people and older residents involved in this evaluation may also have taken part:

- presentations delivered by a small group of young people at local tenants and residents association and Neighbourhood Watch meetings
- young people offering help with everyday chores (such as gardening, cleaning up litter and providing transport to events) to different groups in the local community
- organising opportunities to play sport and games, including an annual football and cricket tournament and other activities to bring people together
- 'Love thy neighbour' pop-up events in public spaces to encourage open interaction and dialogue and also to help those in need (e.g. flood victims in Cumbria).

An important element of the befriending project and other Kumon Y'all activities is making home-cooked Asian food to share with non-Muslim residents. What Kumon Y'all has been doing has featured in the local and national media, increasing the visibility of its work.

2.2 Planned outcomes

The existing logical framework for Kumon Y'all (developed as part of previous work) set out the following measures for the evaluation:

- project inputs: a full-time project manager and two part-time staff to coordinate work
- activities/outputs: engaging young people to plan and deliver community action aimed at promoting social cohesion and tackling prejudice
- impacts: changes in religious and ethnic boundaries between communities; greater learning from each other; changes in participants' quality of life
- outcomes: reduced racism and prejudice.

For the specific purposes of the befriending project, the outcomes were interpreted as:

1. engagement of young people in community actions with two residential complexes for predominantly White older people
2. reduced isolation and misconceptions between different faith and race groups, highlighting shared values across groups
3. reduced isolation and misconceptions between older and young people
4. improved leadership, communication and organisational skills of participants.

3 | Evaluation methodology

3.1 Methodology

The evaluation was undertaken between mid-December 2016 and the end of February 2017. Building on the existing evaluation framework and tools developed by Kumon Y'all as part of the West Yorkshire Racial Justice programme, the evaluation used mixed research methodology and included:

- a literature review of research on community-based action to address prejudice
- a desk review of project and local data
- an online survey of participating young people that tested the extent to which project outcomes were achieved. It asked why young people got engaged; whether there had been any change in their feelings towards people of different ages, faiths and races, and what had contributed to this change; and whether the project had affected participants' leadership, communication and organisational skills (24 responses out of a core group of 50 young people)
- two focus groups with participating young people (11 participants)
- three focus groups with older residents (13 participants out of approximately 50 people who benefited from activities) and two focus groups with local sport club and resident association members (six participants)
- interviews with key community stakeholders (three participants).

The evaluation followed an ethical research protocol. To ensure informed consent, participants signed a consent form and were given a brief account of the evaluation to ensure they had a good understanding of their participation in the research.

All the older people living in the two residential complexes were invited to participate in the focus groups, although not all residents who had been involved in the project were still living there. All young people from Kumon Y'all with experience of the project were invited to participate in the online survey and focus groups. Community stakeholders were identified by Kumon Y'all and included representatives from the local secondary school, local authority and Muslims living in Dewsbury.

4 | Evaluation results

4.1 Evaluation outcomes

Young people planned and organised 20 befriending actions for residents in two complexes for older people during the three-year period being evaluated. The befriending project started in 2013 when Kumon Y'all initially approached the complex managers to offer help in the garden. Relationships with the residents were then developed gradually over time as the young people organised a range of activities in the complexes.

'It was quite nerve-wracking when we first went [to the complex], but once we saw how much [the residents] appreciated us talking to them, it was nice to spend time there. Every event we do takes a lot of work and time, but when [the residents] thank you and you know you have helped them to become more knowledgeable. The whole thing, helping people to come together is very inspiring.' [Young person, 16]

The project managed to engage 200 young people in community actions overall, with a core group of 50 engaging more consistently. Young people got involved in the project through word of mouth. The focus groups suggested that young people were often encouraged to participate by their parents, who wanted their children to engage in a positive local activity. The main reasons given by young people for participating in the project were to make a positive difference and to develop their own skills and capacities.

The core objective of the Kumon Y'all befriending project is to reduce racism and prejudice. The survey indicated a substantial and positive change in young people's feelings towards people of a different faith and race, including older people. It also indicated that they felt more comfortable about visiting neighbourhoods of Dewsbury that are considered as predominantly White British as a direct result of the project.

The survey indicated a very slight negative change in young people's feelings towards their home town (Dewsbury) and their Muslim peers and neighbourhood

(Savile Town). The focus groups suggested that the project had made them more aware of prejudices that exist in their community and peer group. Due to the small sample size, the survey results need to be treated with caution. However, the results from the survey and focus groups both indicate an overall increase in awareness of the prejudices and misconceptions and the need to tackle them in both communities.

'Maybe it is a lot to do with us. We come across with the wrong attitude. We make them feel like we don't want them. And that's why they won't mix with us.' [Older resident, 92]

'Likewise for people from Thornhill, Savile Town was the same as well. [White] people were afraid to come to Savile Town [because of the threat of racial abuse and violence].' [Young person, 23]

The project aimed to reduce isolation and misconceptions by highlighting and sharing values across groups. The befriending project allowed people to explore common interests (for example, in cricket or football) and similarities in their faith and beliefs (in particular that both Christianity and Islam promote peace and harmony).

There is evidence of improved understanding and knowledge of other cultures and beliefs – half the young people stated that their understanding of people of a different faith or race had improved due to the project. The focus groups indicated that some misconceptions still exist among older people and some of them remained concerned about engagement with the wider minority ethnic community. Some saw limited opportunities to interact, constrained by living in separate neighbourhoods but also by language and some cultural practices³. Both the older residents and young people felt that the intervention had reduced prejudices, although the older people raised some doubts about whether these changes would be sustained in the longer term.

³ Focus groups suggested that elderly participants were particularly concerned about: burkas being worn by Muslim women living in Dewsbury (comments included: 'I like to see faces, you don't know otherwise if they are smiling at you or not' [older resident, 76]; 'Something that I disagree with completely, when the women are driving and they can just about to see [burkas]. How is that possible? And that is why you cannot be friendly with them, because you can't see them. When you walk about, you just cannot get to them because they've got a barrier. It's like a barrier between them and us. I don't know whether they have to wear them?' [older resident, 88]); the separation by gender (comments included: 'They didn't mix. Well our school up here, when they come to sing [carols] they are usually mixed, boys and girls. That's what I don't understand' [older resident, 87]); and how women are treated (comments included: 'But the way the Asian men treat women disrespectfully, even their own and their own daughters. Which, as a mum, does not sound right. They basically, [think] they [women] are lower class. They are not treated very nicely. I've seen it myself personally.' [older resident, 67]).

'People are now more aware of Muslims, the barrier between local areas has been broken and people are now more engaging with us. It's made a change in local community but it's just the beginning.' [Young person, 17]

'I think after the visit [the elderly in the complex] tolerated the Asian young people a bit better, but there were still doubts in the back of their minds. How much good will linger on [after the intervention] I don't know.' [Older resident, 78]

One of the key project aims was to reduce isolation and misconceptions between older and young people. Evaluation findings indicate that the project led to people feeling more confident when interacting with other communities and groups. Overall, young people's feelings were already relatively favourable towards older people, perhaps because of the self-selected nature of participants. Even with this relatively positive starting point⁴, the survey found the most consistent positive change in young people's feelings was towards older people of different races and faiths.

'There was this one White lady who asked why are not more Asian people thinking like me and I explained to her that we are not all the same, that some Muslim people do bad things but that our religion does not teach us to do bad things but to live in peace in whatever country you are. And she had more questions to me about all the things what the media says, and I think I was able to change that perception of what people think.' [Young person, 17]

Existing evidence (for example, Dovidio *et al.*, 2011) has suggested that indirect contact can have broad effects, such as reducing intergroup threat, increasing intergroup understanding and trust, and reducing the experience of stereotype threat. Within this relatively small group we have not been able to explore whether the interaction has affected the attitudes of participants' wider social networks.

Kumon Y'all aims to improve the skills and competence of young people in challenging prejudice and racial hate by facilitating weekly sessions where young people take the lead in developing community actions, one of which was the befriending project. The focus groups and survey both indicated improvements in young people's confidence in tackling misconceptions and misunderstandings, generated through their involvement in the project. The survey results suggested that

⁴ The survey suggested that before participating in the project, only 10% (two out of 24) of young people did not feel favourable and warm towards older people of different faith and race and over 60% felt favourable towards older people of different race and faith. After the intervention, just 5% (or one young person) continued to have negative feelings towards older people of different faith and race.

the project had made most impact in developing participants' leadership skills, providing young people with possible solutions to local problems and making them more comfortable about meeting new people.

'We go out and talk about things with our friends. At the end of the day, it is just about misconceptions, but it just needs to be communicated more clearly. I make a more conscious effort now.' [Young person, 18]

There are a number of potential reasons for the more limited impact in reducing racism and prejudice in Dewsbury:

- Compared to most other parts of Britain, the scale of demographic change in Dewsbury is exceptional. In less than 40 years, the town has become 44% Muslim, with some neighbourhoods predominantly Asian Muslim, including 93% in Savile Town (2011 Census). This may make it more challenging to tackle prejudices between White British people who have lived in the area a long time and migrant groups. Overall, older residents in particular had had very limited direct contact with the Muslims living in Dewsbury prior to the intervention, and any ideas they had formed about Muslims living in Dewsbury were mostly based on indirect information.
- Older people were particularly concerned that English is not spoken in some communities. Recent research on national identity suggests that language matters more to national identity than other aspects (Stokes, 2017).

'In America they took people from all over the world, all different languages, and they made them all learn to speak English. Here, when they go to shops, their language is adequate. But among themselves, they don't [speak English]. If they could just get into the habit of speaking English everywhere, that would make a world of difference.' [Older resident, 87]

- Underpinning many negative feelings was a sense of distress at the decline of the local urban area and its amenities. Community stakeholders pointed to an acute sense of 'unfairness' that fuelled resentment, arising from any perceived differential treatment. For example, one local area has had upgraded football pitches. Such changes are also perceived as being at the expense of other groups and areas.

- The befriending intervention may not have been frequent and long term enough to make a difference. From the perspective of an older resident, three years is not considered a long period of time. Participating young people actively attended Kumon Y'all weekly sessions to tackle prejudice, and also mixed with people outside the project, but the older residents had much more limited interaction with the project and very little contact with people outside their complex.

'My only [other] contact with Asians is with taxi drivers.' [Older resident, 92]

- Some older people felt the intervention should target other age groups to effectively address prejudice in the local community. Previous research (Jang *et al.*, 2012) has suggested that prejudice increases with age.

'If you're asking [elderly] people to cooperate and mix, you are talking to the wrong age group.' [Older resident, 87]

4.2 Evidence on 'what works'

Interaction across religious and ethnic boundaries was singled out as the main contributing factor to positive changes in participants' level of prejudice. The key areas of good practice identified by the focus group participants and community representatives include:

- Accept that a long-term approach to community intervention is necessary to achieve sustained changes in prejudice or racism. The intervention needs to be 'low and slow' but durable, led by grass-roots community projects providing services across community boundaries, but also creating platforms for people to interact.
- Social and fun community events where everyone can get involved are effective in bringing people together across different ages and faiths/cultures.

'Fun events for all where you don't necessarily see the agenda until after the event' [Older resident, 76]

- Enabling participation is vital so that it is easy for partners and community to get involved; for example, providing transport and food and running the activity.

'Kumon Y'all gets activity up and running and then they invite you. It is a bit of a leap of faith as most people would like to establish buy-in first. It makes opting in easier as you know they will go ahead with or without you.' [Community stakeholder]

- Be sensitive to participants' cultures and norms when working with people. For example, it was recognised by several stakeholders that some Muslim parents would not allow their children to participate in mixed gender youth groups.

'There are differences within the Asian community. [Muslims in Dewsbury] do things separately, for example prayers are done separately, and the cultural familial system is set up to separate boys and girls ... So, that would be another barrier to break down. To get the right young people through the door, you need to stick with [separate groups] in the first instance.' [Community stakeholder]

Deliver activities that give young people a purpose. Some 56% of young people reported that developing their own skills was a key reason for taking part, so highlighting the personal development benefits may provide an effective engagement route. For example, participating in Kumon Y'all contributes towards the Duke of Edinburgh's Award.

Target those young people who have not necessarily got high aspirations, or do not yet know what they want to do or be, and those who do not have much else going on in their lives. It was suggested by community stakeholders that the Kumon Y'all approach would be less effective if it focused on 'high achievers' or 'troublemakers'.

4.3 Limitations and directions for future research

The qualitative nature of the research design suited the timeframe and research resources but required that the focus was on one aspect of Kumon Y'all's activity where participants could be easily identified and contacted. Such local community projects are typically small scale and cannot by their nature support large longitudinal quantitative analyses.

The evaluation findings are based on a survey (a small sample of 24) and focus groups of young people, and focus groups with older residents. The project actively engaged with a relatively small group of young people and older residents, and a fair

proportion of them were included in the evaluation. To validate the results, the evaluation triangulated findings with local stakeholders using a 'process tracing' approach⁵. The findings are valid for these two groups and do suggest both have realised outcomes in terms of reducing isolation and misconceptions between groups. These outcomes are stronger for the more intensive activity among young people and the research with older residents suggests that they will need more time to fully overcome any prejudicial views. Within this relatively small group we have not been able to explore whether the interaction has affected the attitudes of participants' wider social networks.

Local community stakeholders strongly supported the value of using social and fun events that engage with different communities.

'I think you get a few more people in these events that are there for the food and a good time, and don't really realise [the event] is there to close the differences [between communities]. You go to play bowls because you are invited and it sounds like a good night out. You don't realise you are coming to integrate.'
[Community stakeholder]

The results suggest that this straightforward 'low key' approach should have wide applicability. That said, future research will need to build up more robust evidence and seek to explore the effects of such an approach over the longer term.

⁵ Process tracing is a qualitative research method used to assess causal change without having to rely on a control group. Process tracing can be used both to see if results are consistent with the project's theory of change (detailing how and why change is expected) and to see if alternative explanations can be ruled out.

5 | Scalability of the outcomes

5.1 Scalability and transferability

This small-scale evaluation has found evidence that community-based actions that bring together people from different faith and race groups can address misconceptions and begin to challenge prejudice. The Kumon Y'all befriending project directly addresses the social isolation many older people experience, and the active support from young Muslims living locally to the project, Savile Town, an area of Dewsbury, suggests that this model could easily be replicated in other locations. Even so, engaging and building trust with elderly people can take some time and durable outcomes may require extended support.

Scale of delivery is a factor here. Kumon Y'all has been able to build on its local community experience, and operating across a number of projects can offer young people a range of experiences and personal development opportunities that are clearly attractive to them. It is also important that the project respects the values of the wider community to ensure support for young people's participation. The project works with the community and has built respect among other community organisations. The evaluation has not found any evidence of large-scale interventions in building such networks at a local level. There are still some unknowns, including determining at what stage (if at all) young people and older residents will themselves challenge stereotypes and attitudes among their wider social networks. It is also not clear whether such an approach is equally suited to those who are highly prejudiced.

It is likely that outcomes generated by Kumon Y'all's befriending project will also apply in other settings and contexts. For example, recent Joseph Rowntree Foundation research (Sheehy-Skeffington and Rea, 2017) suggests that interaction at neighbourhood level between low, middle and high-income communities may help address social exclusion and class-based prejudice.

Cantle (2015) poses the question of what might be done to facilitate contact between communities so that they can recognise commonalities: *'Creating shared spaces, where people can encounter people who are different from themselves does change*

attitudes: it can disconfirm stereotypes, undermine prejudice and actually ensure that people are much more comfortable with diversity' (Cantle, 2015, p. 8). The Kumon Y'all befriending project provides a straightforward context for contact between communities that can be replicated elsewhere.

6 | Conclusions and recommendations

6.1 Conclusion

This evaluation has gone some way towards testing the theory that inter-group contact is effective in changing perceptions and prejudicial attitudes towards other faith and ethnic groups. The results indicate that increasing positive intergroup contact has reduced the level of prejudice of participants, with an indication of changes also within the wider community. The evaluation indicates that the befriending project has made both young people and older residents more aware of the prejudices and misconceptions, and the need to tackle them, in both communities.

The reported effects seem to be stronger for young people, who were more open to learning and could also benefit from more intensive involvement in other Kumon Y'all activities. Older residents were not volunteers and so may represent a more challenging group with attitudes that have developed over a long period of time. Nonetheless, they appreciated the support provided by the young people. Whether this translated more widely into a different set of opinions of Muslims living in Dewsbury varied. This may simply take more time as there was no evidence that a more intensive process would have worked with older people.

The 'low and slow' approach, which operates at grass-roots level and brings people together across different ages, faiths and cultures, was identified as effective. The intervention has been designed to provide a platform for participants to explore common interests and similarities in their beliefs and religion. Increasing prominence of positive intergroup contact is crucial, and all stakeholders involved in this evaluation felt that the project should continue.

Notwithstanding the research limitations, the evaluation has built on the existing evidence base of effective approaches to tackle prejudice, with potential for further evaluation of longer-term sustained interventions delivered in different community settings. Further research is required to strengthen and test further the outcomes this evaluation has shown there has been some indicative impact on, and to consider what are impacts in the longer-term and whether the changing attitudes of

participants will have an effect on their interaction with family and wider social networks.

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Contacts

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