

Sudanese Children In Need



The Basis Project

Building and sustaining success

Refugee Council

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## **Experience Paper: Sudanese Children in Need – Collaborating with Ethiopian Welfare Association**

### **About Sudanese Children in Need**

Sudanese Children in Need is a community organisation, which aims to help and support Sudanese children, young people and their parents in education, health, cultural, training, and improve parenting skills. It was formed in 2004, and registered as a charity, to work in and outside England and Wales.

Our Management Committee consists of eight members with various skills which helps the organisation to progress and improve the services provide to Sudanese community. Five volunteers and one administrator provide their support to the organisation's activities.

Sudanese Children in Need has delivered different activities to support Sudanese families in many areas to help them live balanced and stable lives in their new society, and to improve family relationships.

We are one of the few organisations providing services to all Sudanese people living in the UK from different parts of Sudan, without any differentiation because of religious or tribal backgrounds. That has helped us to gain experience and skills in working with multi cultural communities.

### **In this paper we will focus on our collaborative work with the Ethiopian Welfare Association.**

We will explore the positive results that this work brought our organisations through working in partnership, and how the collaboration and experience sharing benefited the management committees and members of both the Sudanese Children in Need and Ethiopian Welfare Association in terms of adding new knowledge through sharing thoughts and visions during all project stages. Also we will reflect on the benefits to our communities that came from this project, having analysed and evaluated their views at the end of the project.

## **Our collaboration project with the Ethiopian Welfare Association**

We had identified that there were sometimes difficulties between young people from different African countries, particularly on the grounds of religion, and we wanted to develop a project to help tackle this.

We had built a good relationship with Ethiopian Welfare Organisation and we had met before in many different forums and meetings concerning African community matters. During the past two years we looked to extend our experience and skills by working with different communities like the Ethiopian community who is different from the Sudanese community in terms of origin, language, culture, customs, traditions and religion. We both felt that through partnership work and sharing experience and knowledge we could benefit both the Sudanese and Ethiopian communities.

We chose the religion project for our collaborative work because this area has the most important influence on young people's behaviours and attitudes. These days the wrong understanding of religious concepts leads to distribute hatred among the people living in one society. We found it is necessary to raise awareness for both communities regarding different faith values to understand the right concept of religions and use that to build closer social ties between members of the same society, in order to renounce violence and hatred.

The two community organisations worked together in all project stages. Our clear idea (which was shared by both organisations) about the aim and objectives for the project helped us to do a good application to the community fund (Faith in Action programme) which they supported.

We had simple written agreement between the two organisations to avoid misunderstanding. It provides a common reference point, useful to guide the collaboration on a daily basis in addition to occasions when confusion arises. It was good practice for us both, and it was new knowledge for the volunteers and staff in the two communities.

Our project ran between May 2010 – March 2011. The project provided twenty support sessions run equally between the Sudanese and Ethiopian communities. The activities were run in the Kings Cross area as this is easy to reach from many areas of London, and users from different areas came and participated. We shared the project management, and equally shared providing the sessions. We made sure to make the sessions very interactive, giving the participants the opportunity to get involved in discussions and ask questions which helped them to obtain greater knowledge and enrich their understanding. We also shared traditional food which had very great impact on strengthening the relation between participants.

The project's topics addressed the values and habits of cultural belonging to the Muslim and Christian communities, which encouraged them to share ideas and answer each others queries regarding different aspects of the faiths and cultures. The new information and understanding users obtained

through the awareness raising sessions helped them to build strong friendships and respect between both communities.

Face to face dialogue supported people to develop a better understanding of one other and practicing their values and build strong bridge of trust between people from Sudanese and Ethiopian communities. We discovered that we all share a core belief in the value of positive social action.

The Management Committees of both organisations exchanged management and control of the sessions. Every part provide full management for 10 sessions, (the subject of the lectures, the food, and lead the discussions after that) we shared that one sessions by one sessions.

Volunteers from Ethiopian and Sudanese communities helped manage the sessions and worked together in harmony to build experience and skills, which will help us, all to use these skills in the future to provide our services more effectively.

At the end of the project we worked together in order to monitor and evaluate our project's achievements. From users' feedback we identified that the project helped the participants to understand more about the different religions and also to build a very strong relationship between the communities involved. The longer term impact is that these relations continue up to now in the participant's social life.

#### **Problems and barriers we faced in doing this, and how we overcame them.**

We always discussed potential issues in advance to clarify roles and responsibilities and to get a common understanding, so we didn't face many problems in working together on the project.

The only obstacle that faced us during the project life was the language barriers as a large number of people from the Sudanese community speak Arabic and some English. The same is true of the Ethiopian community; a large number of them speak their local language and some are English speaking. When we encountered this unexpected problem we decided as management committees and volunteers to share translation to the different groups in their own language. We also distributed summaries for the sessions in different languages- that made it easy to follow.

When we faced the translation difficulty, the users themselves from the both communities began to help each when we have this unexpected problem we decided as management committees and volunteers to share translation to the different groups in their own language. We also distributed summaries for the sessions in different languages - that made it easy to follow one another and to share translating. We considered the involvement of the users to manage the translation aspects is a clear indication of success for our project because it reflected their attraction to the topics raised through the project's sessions and their interest to share it with everyone. That gave us a good sign and reflected that our project had achieved its goal.

### **Key learning points from our work**

Working with other groups through the project activities helped us as SCIN to gain skills and knowledge of how to co-operate with different groups who are typically different in culture, traditions, language and religion. This was at all project stages from planning, delivering to monitoring and evaluating. A lesson we have learned from our work with a partner is to look at the benefit to society as a whole and not just on our society when we plan and implement projects.

Our partner organisation also gained this knowledge because it was the first time for them to collaborate with a different community group. The experience we both got will help us in the future to look to the problems and barriers our RCOs experience with a broad vision and to be able to support different areas where they need help.

The feedback from users helped us to identify the following outcomes, which we would like to share with other organisations considering doing similar work:

- Users said this is the first time they identified that there is common ground: similar values, similar interests between different faiths living in the same society.
- The project encouraged women and youth to improve communication skills.
- The project improved the knowledge of users about different faiths.
- The project improved presentation skills for users through discussing ideas and understanding the other group's ideas.
- The project helped users to express belief, customs and tradition which open one's mind away from religious prejudices and racism, and build a strong base for a relationship between different faiths.
- The project helped in strengthening the spirit of debate among women and creates a kind of self-reliance in launching their own ideas in order to access answers.
- The project helped improve the relation between our organization and our community and with other communities in the same society.
- The volunteers who were involved in the project got presentation and management skills through their involvement in the project, that will help them in the future in community and paid work.

### **Tips for other RCOs considering doing something similar**

We advise organisations that would like to work on a project through partnership to focus on the following:

- to look carefully at whether the project is appropriate to the aims, objectives and capacity of the two organisations. The project should also fit with the needs of the community as a whole.

- in selecting the partner organisation it is useful to have basic criteria in terms of ability to meet the goals and the diversity of experiences. For example the standard level of service for the two organisations working in partnership should be similar or convergent in order for the work to go smoothly
- the overall vision for each partner should be close but not necessarily to be identical in order for both organisations to benefit from the partnership. It is important to be open about any differences in the vision and aims of the partner organisations, and for each partner to be willing to learn from the other. This will enable the exchange of experience and knowledge that will increase the quality of the project and benefit the communities. At the same time it will improve the experience of the Board of Directors and the volunteers working in the project.

**Sudanese Children in Need would be interested in sharing learning in this area with other RCOs.**

We are happy to share our experience with other RCO organisations that wish to implement similar projects to benefit from our experience.

For more information about how you can learn from Sudanese Children in Need's experience, please email [basis@refugeecouncil.org.uk](mailto:basis@refugeecouncil.org.uk)

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