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Leeds City Council, and London Borough of Camden

Council of Europe joint funded project:
Brave Spaces in Leeds and Camden



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1. Foreword

Camden and Leeds. United in a shared commitment to interculturalism.

In Camden, we are committed to putting residents at the centre of all the work we do and working innovatively to improve their experience of living in the borough. Working with the Council of Europe via the Intercultural Cities (ICC) programme, Leeds City Council and Camden embarked on transforming community engagement through testing a concept called 'Brave Space Cafés'.

This included engaging with residents from all backgrounds, including some of our most vulnerable, to discuss often unspoken myths, misunderstandings and issues that, when addressed collectively can improve community cohesion. We have been grateful to Leeds and to ICC for working with us on this project, and we are excited to see where it takes us next as this important work evolves.

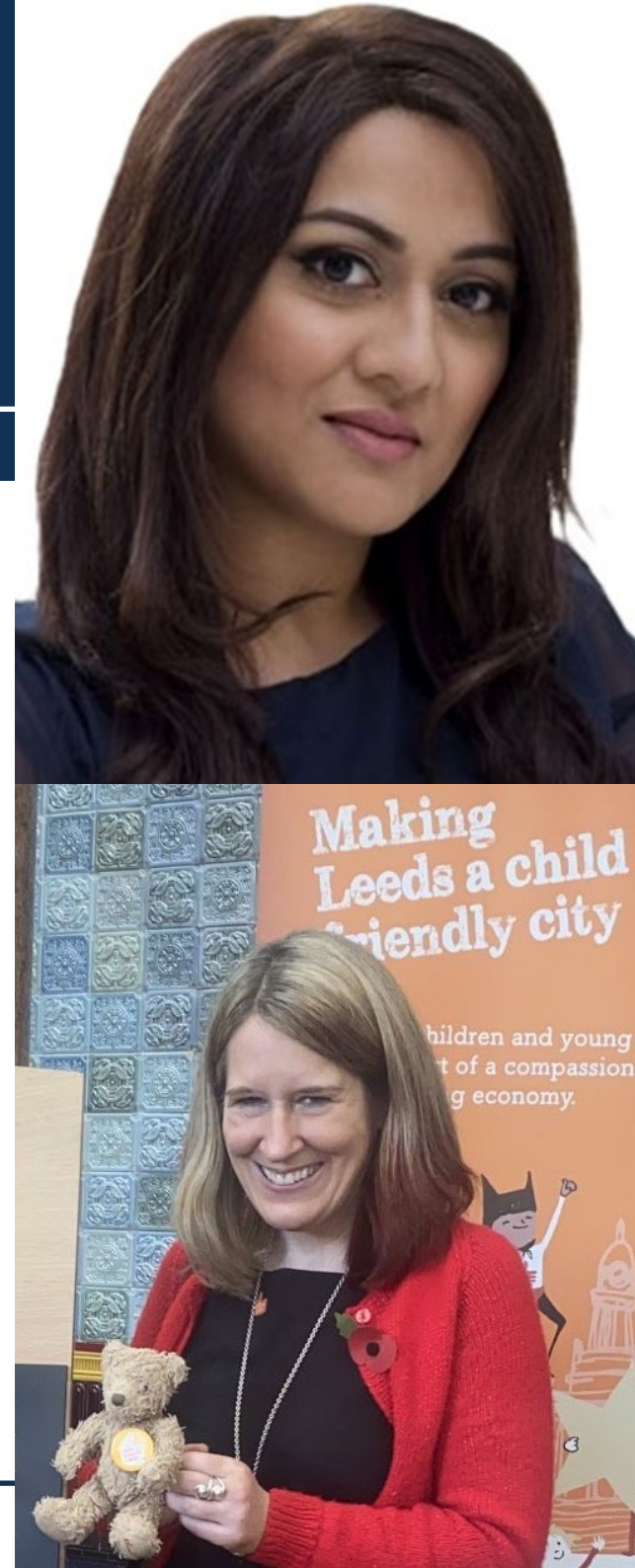
Councillor Nadia Shah, Cabinet Member for Equalities, Young People, and Cohesion

Leeds City Council is committed to utilising all opportunities to work with our partners across the UK and Europe. We want to ensure that our local communities benefit from the best practice in activity supporting interculturalism.

The Brave Spaces project aligns perfectly with our Best City Ambition, as well as helping us to address some of the most pressing issues in supporting our communities to live harmoniously together delivering the outcome of improving social cohesion.

The project is particularly significant as it addresses misinformation in and across our communities, be they geographic or social groupings, which can often lead to misunderstandings and hostility. Our anti rumour work is critical to this. We look forward to continuing our engagement with our friends in Camden, and taking this important work forward after this wonderful project has concluded.

Councillor Fiona Venner (Leeds) Executive Board Member for Equality, Health and Wellbeing, and Chair of the Leeds ICC Steering Group



2. Introduction

The Council of Europe offered an exciting opportunity for proposals for inter-city grants 2024. This funding offered 20,000 Euros to be split between two cities and would start in April 2024 and end in November 2024 with an evaluation report submitted by 15 December 2024.



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This funding call was seen as a good opportunity to work with another Local Authority in the UK where we could learn from each other and share good practice to improve cohesion outcomes.

Following initial contact between Leeds City Council and Camden Council it became instantly apparent that this opportunity was an excellent challenge to collaborate on a joint project that would focus on tackling the rumours within communities that sometimes lead to hostility, and to encourage frank conversations.

A requirement of this project also included engagement with a European city with relevant experience to share as the project developed. This was initially identified as Botkyra, on the outskirts of Stockholm, Sweden, who have been using anti-rumour methodologies to tackle challenges within local communities. However, due to time constraints and other commitments, an alternative city was sought – Bilbao, a city in Spain and which is discussed in detail within this report.

3. Background

The ICC Inter-City Grants have provided us with a valuable opportunity to collaborate on an important issue for our communities.

Leeds City Council: is the local authority of the City of Leeds in West Yorkshire, England. It provides the majority local government services in the city and is the second most populous local government district in the United Kingdom with approximately 800,000 inhabitants living within its area.

Leeds joined the ICC Network in 2019 and following completion of the ICC index questionnaire, the Leeds results were published. The Council of Europe visited Leeds in 2022 and subsequently an updated report included recommendations was published. The Leeds ICC Working Group continues to work with council and city services to action the recommendations through partnership work and calling upon ICC experts.

Camden Council: is the local authority for the London Borough of Camden in Greater London England. It is a London borough council, one of 32 in London. Camden is a diverse and vibrant borough with a history of activism and grassroots activity and is home to large global businesses and scientific and cultural organisations.

Camden joined the ICC network in 2020 and following this, many examples of Camden's work in the areas of equalities, diversity, and inclusion were posted on the ICC website as examples of good practice. Camden's Equalities service continues to build their relationship with ICC through the attendance of meetings and conferences and networking with other cities, and this Brave Spaces project is a momentous step forward in this work.



4. Project Brief

Learning from the lessons of existing ICC good practice, such as the **anti-rumour cafés in Botkyrka, Sweden**, which identified challenges in engaging people from the majority settled communities, Camden and Leeds took things one step further.

We provided a series of opportunities for dialogue on areas of misunderstanding between communities in Camden and Leeds, building on existing ICC Anti-Rumour methodology. Camden developed Brave Space guidelines to test out in Leeds and Camden. Feedback was sought from both sides of community partners during initial planning meetings, and all agreed that the guidelines would bring benefits to the proposed sessions.

From there, Camden and Leeds planned a series of what Camden called 'Brave Space Café' sessions in both Camden and Leeds, following the Brave Space guidelines, and using the definition of a Brave Space:

Brave Space = A community space where different points on a journey of learning and growing are acknowledged. Community members engage in critical dialogue through conscious questioning and active listening. While all are expected to make their best effort to be respectful, there is an understanding that someone may say something that result in unintentional offense and hurt feelings for those around. A primary assumption of Brave Space is that everyone speaks with the positive intent of seeking greater knowledge and understanding. Brave Space Cafés are regarded as a Brave Space where all members of the community are welcome, and where people with different life experiences and

ideas are encouraged to learn from one another. All participants in the Brave Space must agree when using this space to keep it a place where all members can come to learn, grow and be.

Both Local Authorities felt these guidelines for face-to-face sessions aligned with the Anti-Rumour methodology, allowing participants to explore rumours, misconceptions, and areas of community tension in a safe environment. Camden and Leeds decided that the project's overarching theme would be 'language matters' and planned to cover three sessions in each municipality with various themes, to be decided on in partnership with third sector organisations, who have the most contact with communities and would be best placed to guide us on areas of interest or concern. The project's objectives support both Camden and Leeds' longer-term plans for communities where all voices feel included, and no group is left behind or ignored.

In each municipality, we are using the Brave Space Café sessions as a beacon relating to existing work to empower communities, and dispelling myths one conversation/ event at a time. It has been inspiring and a huge learning curve to test different and innovative engagement styles, inspired by the ICC's anti-rumour methodology, and evaluate the impact of each method and share findings.

5. Methodology

Working in partnership with another borough and local third sector organisations.

Throughout the project, members of the Leeds ICC working group and Camden's equalities service had regular online meetings to ensure project activities were shared, and project goals aligned with evolving experiences. This included initial meetings bringing together third sector organisations from both Leeds and Camden.

Camden explored possible themes for their Brave Space Café sessions by researching anti-rumour methodology and working out what kind of rumours and myths were relevant to Camden and needed to be addressed in the sessions. They wanted to focus particularly on harmful myths that resulted in discrimination and stigma towards vulnerable or marginalised communities. Camden spoke to partners from the third sector, including Forum+ a local LGBTQ+ charity tackling hate crime, 7PK a charity improving social mobility for disadvantaged young people, Hopscotch a charity tackling intersectional racial and gender inequalities, and Camden Safety Net who support victims of domestic violence and abuse. Active discussions resulted in the following themes for Camden's four Brave Café sessions: 'Does racism exist within interracial communities?', 'What are the myths surrounding domestic violence and abuse?', 'Do the LGBTQ+ community feel safe?', and 'Understanding refugees, migrants, and asylum seekers.'

To increase and ensure broad based participation, it was decided to issue travel vouchers to each participant to pay for local transportation costs. The high attendance levels and active participation from attendees soon validated this decision.

The first of Camden's sessions was planned for August but had to be postponed due to safety, as there was violent disorder

across the UK. When the violence stopped, it was clear that these Brave Space Café sessions had become even more important and that people from marginalised communities needed to have their voices heard, and common myths and misconceptions leading to discrimination and exclusion needed to be tackled.

This shocking backdrop to the Brave Space Café sessions therefore made the work feel even more important and urgent, in the UK but also in other countries across Europe where similar disorder has been happening.

This project allowed Leeds to build on previous work undertaken in the Seacroft area of the city. Seacroft has traditionally been a predominantly white British working-class area, however the demographic is becoming more culturally diverse. A local hotel has been utilised to house people seeking asylum, and this has been a topic of contention for some locals. The area has been targeted by far-right groups spreading fear amongst local communities, as well as staging protests outside the hotel.

In 2023 the Local Authority held a session in Seacroft which provided an opportunity for local residents who volunteer with the We Are Seacroft collective, to attend a question and answer session about the hotel, with myth-busting and factual information about the process of seeking asylum. The session allowed common misconceptions and local rumours to be unpicked and provided a counter narrative to the far-right anti-migrant rhetoric circulating online.

5. Methodology

Working in partnership with Camden and local third sector organisations.

Leeds wanted to build on this work using the anti-rumour methodology, to tackle other misconceptions and areas of tension or confusion.

Working with community partners LS14 Trust and Chapel FM, we agreed to explore topics under the umbrella of 'language matters', such as the LGBTQ+ community and the idea of gender identity.

Our partners informed us that people would benefit from discussing these ideas openly, allowing people to ask questions and explore potential bias.

Whilst delivering the project, incidents of significant timing took place both in Leeds and across the UK. In July, we saw unrest in the streets of Harehills, a densely populated, culturally diverse, and deprived area of Leeds. The disturbance was the result of an ongoing Child Protection case, exacerbated by rumours. With events from the evening live streamed on Tik Tok and media coverage of the unrest, rumours continued to circulate after the disturbance, which saw specific communities being blamed, accusations over how police responded, and risk of further disorder.

Later in the summer, we saw disorder across the country led by far-right groups, with anti-migrant disinformation acting as the catalyst.

This climate directly impacted the project and shaped the direction of our remaining face to face sessions. The second session in Leeds focused on disinformation online, unpicking different versions of events from the local unrest and the importance of critical thinking in times of such strong polarisation.

Following this session, feedback was received from participants and community partners that they would benefit from exploring the Anti-Rumour methodology further. We therefore decided to hold a workshop for the third session, where we would share experiences about local rumours, and discuss barriers to meaningful dialogue. We then applied the tools and insights available to us in the Anti-Rumour methodology to assist when these conversations arise in day-to-day interactions.

Leeds was keen to maximise the partnership opportunity to work with Chapel FM and decided to bring people together to record some discussions in audio format for the fourth session. This recording can be edited into a podcast or be included in local radio, to circulate further.

6. Peer learning with Bilbao



In August 2024, Leeds and Camden welcomed Claudia Emmanuel from Bilbao City Council to discuss their experiences of leading an Anti-Rumours Strategy. Forty people attended the online seminar including those from both councils and the Third Sector to learn about Bilbao's Anti-Rumours Strategy and share good practice. During the online seminar, Bilbao outlined the key Anti-Rumour interventions it had used such as local engagement through neighbourhoods, delivering training and building awareness amongst young people and engaging local media outlets. Through this knowledge sharing, Bilbao were able to share the lessons they have learnt in delivering their well-established Anti-Rumours work allowing these to be implemented in the planning and delivery of Leeds and Camden's approaches.

7. Voluntary and Community Sector



Hopscotch Women's Centre



7PK

Hopscotch seeks to address racial and gender inequity and empowers women facing injustice and disadvantage in a culturally sensitive way, so they can be included and equal in society. The work that they do aims to improve the physical and mental health of women and their families, increase women's economic participation by improving their employability skills and resilience, reduce the risk of gender-based violence, and increase women's voice and representation through advocacy and policy work.

Since 1998, Hopscotch have strived to build a community where all women are empowered, connected, well, and safe, enabling them to reach their full potential. Their diverse team is fluent in 27 languages, enabling them to provide support to people from various diasporas in Camden and across London.

Hopscotch run a Women's Centre in Camden, through which they empower many Camden residents. They also run Homecare services, offering domiciliary care services which are designed to foster an inclusive environment where those who need it most can live with dignity and respect.

Camden Council worked with Hopscotch on the Brave Space Café session exploring whether racism exists within interracial communities, as well as the sessions on tackling domestic violence and abuse, and understanding refugees, migrants and asylum seekers. In all of these areas, it was invaluable to have Hopscotch's expertise and experience working with women from many different backgrounds and cultures.

7PK is a charity that provides people in disadvantaged situations with increased access to opportunities, networks and experiences that are a norm for their more privileged peers, putting them in control of their own social mobility and professional progression.

They work with charities, social enterprises, local authorities and companies to design programmes, deliver expert training and develop robust strategies to transform:

- Youth and community engagement efforts.
- Equity, diversity and inclusion initiatives.
- Acquisition and development of underrepresented talent.

Camden Council worked with 7PK for the Brave Space Café events focusing on racism within interracial communities, and understanding refugees, migrants and asylum seekers. It was very useful to work with 7PK given their expertise in facilitation, particularly when addressing difficult topics with residents who are not necessarily used to platforming their opinions and thoughts.

7. Voluntary and Community Sector

forum+

forum+

forum+ is a local organisation that offers support services and free events and activities, to Camden's LGBTQ+ community. They organise events and activities that celebrate Camden and Islington's LGBTQ+ community. Their Director, Tessa Havers-Strong, said 'we have built a real community and it's lovely to see people join and make new friends. We also provide specialist support to people who are victims of LGBTQ+ hate crime and work closely with local partners.'

All events and activities run by forum+ are free to join. They are for LGBTQ+ people, and their friends, who live, work or study in Camden or Islington, and all services are available to people aged 18 and over. Their events programme has a strong emphasis on wellbeing, helping people stay active and nature – so a lot of the activities are based around one or more of these themes. Examples include regular kayaking on the canal by Pirate Castle, monthly walks in different locations around London, regular Cook With Pride events where people cook and enjoy a meal together. They also run a range of online events, including a spoken word event and a film club, which are very popular.

forum+ are a key partner of Camden Council, so we worked with them to deliver our Brave Space Café entitled 'Do the LGBTQ+ community feel safe?'. As detailed below, this was a fascinating session in which LGBTQ+ people and allies alike spoke about their experiences in Camden and offered their suggestions as to how to make the borough a safer place.



7. Voluntary and Community Sector



Naz & Matt Foundation

The Naz & Matt Foundation are a specialist charity providing a comprehensive range of trauma informed 1-2-1 and group support services to LGBTQ+ individuals, or their parents, from religious or culturally conservative backgrounds. They work mainly in the areas of religious and cultural homophobia, 'honour' based abuse, LGBTQ+ forced marriage and conversion therapy, all of which fall under the wider umbrella category of domestic abuse.

They support people who have experienced an incident or pattern of controlling, coercive, threatening, degrading and/or violent behaviour, which is connected to their LGBTQ+ identity and the religion or culture they were born into. This abuse can include, but is not limited to, bullying, psychological, physical, sexual, emotional, or economic abuse. They work with victims, survivors and the perpetrators (parents) to help resolve challenges connected to religion, culture, sexual orientation and gender identity.

Their long-term mission is to prevent these forms of abuse from happening. They campaign in the local and national media, delivering talks, training and workshops to schools, colleges and universities, central government, law enforcement agencies, and NGOs about the dangers of religious and cultural homophobia, and how it intersects with honour-based crimes and domestic familial abuse.

They also produce media which is used as educational material, including short films and books, and support projects that empower LGBTQ+ individuals to be the person they were born to be.

The Naz and Matt Foundation have won multiple awards for their work building bridges between religious and LGBTQ+ communities. Camden Council worked with them on the Brave Space Café session about whether LGBTQ+ people feel safe, and it was very important to have their expertise in this space, meaning that we could have meaningful discussions about intersectionality and the challenges of having multiple protected characteristics and the difficulties of being an LGBTQ+ person who is not accepted by their family or community.



7. Voluntary and Community Sector

LS14
TRUST



LS14 Trust/We Are Seacroft: Working within the heart of our community to tackle rumours

The LS14 Trust was set up in 2009 by a group of local people who wanted to work together to change the communities that they loved across Seacroft, Swarcliffe and Whinmoor.

Our vision is to see LS14 become a welcoming, vibrant, happy place where people feel in control and are proud of their achievements – a place where every resident is safe and respected. We want this to be a well-connected community which recognizes its power to bring about and sustain positive social change.

Our mission is to build upon the strengths of our community by working to develop activities and opportunities, promoting the area as a vibrant and exciting place to live, work and bring up a family.

The Trust plays a lead role in the We Are Seacroft Community Network. The network grew out of wanting to be a well-connected community that recognises its power to create social change and sustain a safer environment for everyone. In responding to local, and global, challenges, we saw the power of collaboration and a community who were able to look out for each other and look after each other. We saw that we had the skills and resources to make real change between us and we are committed to working closely together, long term. Many of the people involved have lived and worked in Seacroft for a long time but came together in new ways.

The training has empowered organisations and individuals within We Are Seacroft to navigate challenging conversations effectively, fostering greater cohesion in their everyday life and community work. By equipping participants with strategies to identify and counter misinformation, we are better prepared to handle sensitive topics that arise during community engagement.

Practical activities, such as role-playing scenarios and techniques to address divisive issues, have enhanced our ability to hold respectful and impactful dialogues. This is particularly crucial when addressing concerns fuelled by misinformation or biases within our community.

Moreover, the training has strengthened the organisations' capacity to promote media literacy, helping us to critically evaluate information sources. As a result, the organisations can confidently facilitate discussions on complex issues, fostering trust and collaboration. while addressing misconceptions in constructive ways.



Chris Jackson,
Director of Operations at LS14 TRUST

7. Voluntary and Community Sector



Chapel FM – how community radio can be an asset in tackling rumours

Chapel FM Arts Centre uses community radio and other related arts such as storytelling, music, theatre, writing, and creative activism to give people in our community of Seacroft, East Leeds tools to think differently about opportunities and challenges. Our radio station, East Leeds Community Radio, produces more than 40 different radio shows and podcasts about topics ranging from local community organising to the climate emergency to various art forms to global connections between Leeds and its twin cities.

The partnership work Leeds Council around Anti-Rumours has come at a perfect time for our organisation. For example, during the past two years we have been building strong relationships with many of the 200+ asylum seekers residing in the Britannia Hotel in Seacroft, a short walk from our arts centre. This past summer when there were acts of violence directed at asylum seekers and refugees in a number of communities across the UK, Chapel FM and our partner organisations in the “We Are Seacroft” network were vigilant about the possibility of similar actions happening here in Seacroft.

Thanks to the Anti-Rumour training and other activities conducted with Leeds Council staff, we had strong plans in place to diffuse tensions and use our shared community venues to create safe, welcoming spaces where asylum seekers and other residents of our community could mingle in a calm, friendly context, something we strongly believe helped keep tensions down during a critical time.

The Anti-Rumour training also had many positive ripple-effects in other areas of our work. In particular discussions about gender, neurodiversity, ethnic, disability, and other forms of diversity, provided important insights that we were able to bring into our own community media training programmes with young people and adults, and then, in turn, shape many of our regular radio shows and podcasts. In addition, the work on the role of social media and other new technologies in creating and disseminating rumours is something that sits at the heart of our work - and the training in these areas led directly to some new methods for running our radio training programmes focusing on methods for checking facts and understanding how false information gets created and flows through communities.

We look forward to continuing to work with Leeds Council designing more bespoke training and discussions amongst staff across the We Are Seacroft organisations in the future, while addressing misconceptions in constructive ways.



**Tony Macaluso, Director
– Chapel FM Arts Centre**

8. Case Studies

Leeds Event 1 – Pride, Prejudice and Pronouns: Why language matters

Are you confident talking about gender identity, sexual orientation and pronouns? Or do you find the subject confusing? Do you want to say the right thing, but you're worried you'll get it wrong and cause offence? For many people in Leeds, it is the latter.



That is why Leeds City Council ran the first of a series of Brave Space Cafés, to help diverse communities understand each other better, with a focus on the LGBTQ+ community. And for clarity, LGBTQ+ is an acronym that stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and other sexual orientations and gender identities. The plus sign at the end of the acronym represents additional identity terms.

The session looked at common misconceptions and provided attendees with an opportunity to ask questions and find out more about the subject in a warm, friendly and supportive environment. The event was held in Seacroft, and run in partnership with Seacroft's LS14 Trust and Chapel FM. It was attended by 30 people from the local community who wanted to improve their understanding of a subject that can be surrounded by heated debate and sometimes toxic misunderstandings.

The community members attending were all people engaged to some degree with the We Are Seacroft collective. They were mostly, but not all people from a white British background, and mostly people who did not have personal experience of LGBTQ+ issues. Through their engagement with the collective, they all shared a commitment to be agents for positive change within their communities. The facilitators of the session were members of Leeds City Council's LGBTQ+ staff network, who were keen to share their lived experiences.

Key discussion points included whether the UK is safe for the LGBTQ+ community, why 'Pride' events are still important, and whether language matters in terms of gender. There were also some interesting discussions around why people who are LGBTQ+ may have to seek asylum here from other countries, and what could happen if we assume someone's identity or 'out' them.

8. Case Studies

Leeds Event 2 – Don't (always) believe what you read: Social media and anti-migrant narratives

Anyone who uses social media or even reads the newspapers will know how difficult it can be to separate fact from opinion and truth from fiction.

In the UK, we saw how an unrelated tragedy in Southport led to a summer of discontent as widely shared but untrue anti-migrant narratives inspired violent disorder across the country. We held a special session in Leeds on 17 October looking at how rumours and misunderstanding spread. The session brought together 15 people from across Leeds to share their experience of the summer's events, how they were perceived locally, and the contrasts with how they were described online and in the media.

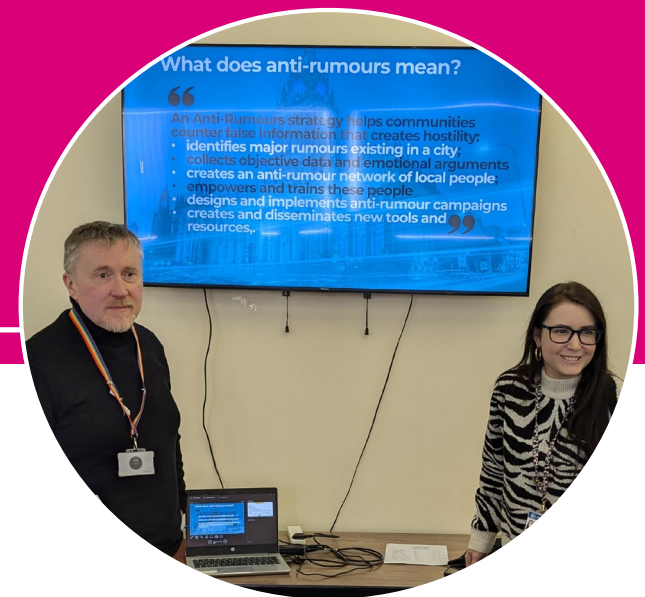
“ The thing that stuck with me was clarifying the idea that there are some people who are open to having [difficult] conversations and open to changing their minds and some people who are completely closed off – that stuck with me because we all know those two people but it was helpful to have that distilled so you can know when to go with the conversation and when to leave it, which stops you from burning your energy up. **R, Local resident, Seacroft, Leeds** ”



8. Case Studies

Leeds Event 3 – Helping communities to have better conversations about differences

Throughout our Intercultural Cities-funded anti-rumours project, we have been looking at how rumours and misunderstandings can drive wedges between communities, and lead to hostility.



For our third in-person session, we brought together 17 people from across the Seacroft community, with the help of LS14 Trust, to weave all these threads together and talk about how they can be advocates for accuracy and greater understanding within their neighbourhoods.

The participants were all self-selected people who had taken part in the previous sessions, and embodied a variety of lived experiences, including ethnicity, faith, sexual orientation and ability. As project organisers, we hugely benefitted from the long and fruitful work of the We Are Seacroft collective in nurturing so many engaged community participants over many years. Without this important groundwork, our own efforts in reaching people through the project could have been much more difficult.

While social media can polarise opinions, face to face conversations give us space to actually engage with people who have different views.

We used the Intercultural Cities guidelines on tackling rumours as a springboard to begin to equip our participants with the skills to have some of those conversations effectively, as well as the Brave Space guidelines to create an atmosphere where people could lean into difficult conversations without fear. We all recognise that criticising and lecturing people rarely shifts their opinion, but listening, empathising and providing a different perspective can.

At the end of the session, we had some fantastic contributions about practical ways to bring people together to have conversations and bring down some of the barriers of fear or misunderstanding that often lie at the root of the polarisation we all see.

8. Case Studies

Camden Event 1 – Racism within interracial communities

Are you wary of addressing racism within interracial communities because of fear of conflict, lack of awareness, guilt and shame, fear of being misunderstood and causing offence or social pressure?

That's why we invited the various communities of Camden to participate in the first ever Brave Café discussion on the theme 'racism within interracial communities'. Citizens' participation is not just welcomed, but it's crucial. We value our communities' input and believe we can make a significant difference together.

That is why Camden Council ran the first Brave café sessions on 2nd October to help diverse communities understand each other better.

The discussion started by addressing racism as a social construct and explored the notion of racism within interracial communities. Tackling this internalised prejudice is crucial for building more robust, inclusive relationships.

Over 35 residents attended the conversation from a range of different backgrounds who shared critical points about how racism has affected their upbringing, friendships and relationships. The session also included ice breakers and exercises enabling participants to think deeper on how internal and external racism may have affected themselves or others they know.



Key discussion points

Intentional kindness can sometimes offend other beliefs if it disregards the specific cultural or religious practices of those involved. During the session some residents shared that offering food during Ramadan, when Muslims fast from dawn till sunset, can unintentionally show a lack of understanding or respect for their practice. It's not the kindness itself that's offensive, but rather the disconnect between the intention and the recipient's reality. Being aware of such nuances and tailoring kind gestures to respect individual beliefs and practices can go a long way in fostering genuine understanding and respect.

Discussions also included how issues around class and colourism often involve prioritising the interests of one's group over others, which can lead to discrimination and conflict.

The session also covered subtle forms of racism which often go unnoticed (except for the person feeling the impact of them) and, therefore, unaddressed. This racism can include speech and behaviours that treat cultural differences – such as forms of dress and cultural practices, manifesting in disapproving glances, exclusionary body language, and marginalising people's experiences as invalid.

8. Case Studies

Camden Event 1 – Racism within interracial communities

The conversation closed by noting that tackling racism within interracial communities is not an individual task but a collective effort. It requires a willingness to learn, a commitment to change, and, most importantly, unity. We can build stronger, more inclusive communities by educating ourselves, promoting cultural competence, and fostering allyship. When everyone feels valued and integral to the community, allyship becomes a natural part of our interactions. Together, we can make a difference. Attendees commented on how safe they felt discussing such a sensitive topic openly in a group setting, which positively highlights that the developed Brave Space guidelines are useful and practical for effective community engagement and participation.

“ I just want to thank you for holding this really enjoyable session and when things like this are planned we enjoy them a lot and want to participate. I’m so happy about that! **Local resident, Camden** ”



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8. Case Studies

Camden Event 2 – Working together to address domestic abuse

Understanding the Dynamics

Domestic abuse is a critical issue that impacts individuals across all demographics, and we must take action. That's why we recently hosted the second Brave Café event, a series of community discussions aimed at confronting this challenge head-on.

The event brought together over 57 residents, advocates, and community leaders, including male allies, to share powerful insights and strategies to drive meaningful change.

The session began by delving into the intricate dynamics of domestic abuse, emphasising that it encompasses more than just physical violence. It also includes emotional, psychological, financial, and sexual abuse. These components contribute to coercive control. Understanding these various forms of abuse is not just crucial, it's empowering.

Key discussion points

Myth: Women/girls are at greater risk of DA – is that true or false? The consensus in the room was that it was true. Statistics show that women and girls are more likely to experience domestic abuse compared to their male counterparts. Various factors, including societal norms, gender inequality, and economic dependence, influence this heightened risk.

Myth: Alcohol and drug use is a major cause of domestic violence. – Yes or no? This myth elicited a varied response, and participants were encouraged to distinguish between domestic abuse and substance misuse, recognising that these issues should be regarded and addressed as separate concerns. Furthermore, it is important to note that statistics concerning adult children abusing their parents are frequently underreported, particularly as a growing number of parents are providing housing for their adult children, considering the current housing crisis.

Myth: A man can be a good father even if he abuses his partner; the parents' relationship does not impact the children. True or False? Most people agree that the effects of witnessing domestic abuse on children are traumatic and long-lasting. When a child witnesses domestic abuse, it is considered child abuse. Participants were encouraged to use the term "experience" rather than "witness," as the child is not just observing the abuse; they are actively experiencing it and are affected by it.

8. Case Studies

Camden Event 2 – Working together to address domestic abuse

Myth: Women are more likely to be attacked by strangers than those who claim to love them.

Many attendees initially believed that strangers were more likely to commit domestic violence than individuals known to the victim. However, the statistics presented by the facilitators made it abundantly clear that women are far more often assaulted, raped, and murdered by men they know. In fact, according to Rape Crisis, only about 10% of rapes are committed by men unknown to the victim. Women face a much greater risk from men they trust. Shockingly, in the UK, England, and Wales, a woman is killed by her male partner or former partner every four days. This reality highlights the critical importance of recognising the true nature of domestic violence.

“ I am amazed at how many people from such different backgrounds shared their experiences openly and honestly, people have spoken, and I’ve found that really inspiring and hopeful. **Local resident, Camden** ”



Conclusion

The Brave café discussion on domestic abuse was not just a conversation; it was a catalyst for change. The discussion revealed different views which when debated supported a clearer understanding of domestic abuse. It provided an invaluable experience to participants, equipping them with the knowledge and skills to support survivors effectively. It reminds us of the importance of empathy, practical support, and, most importantly, community involvement in tackling this pervasive issue. Together, we can make a difference and empower change.

These discussions build a sense of community and support among participants, providing emotional and psychological strength to survivors. Moreover, the more we involve our communities, the more we can break down the stigma and silence surrounding domestic violence, encouraging more people to seek help.

8. Case Studies

Camden Event 3 – Do LGBTQ+ communities feel safe?



Camden has a large LGBTQ+ community and a history of LGBTQ+ activism.

However, this does not necessarily mean that everyone in the community feels safe in the borough, and there is widespread misinformation in the UK media surrounding LGBTQ+ people.

This Brave Café started with us reassuring attendees that this is a brave space, and if they find any of the topics triggering, they can step outside or one of us can support them. Many of the attendees identified as LGBTQ+ but not all of them did. As the first of these sessions was postponed due to the violent unrest across the UK, it was emphasised that it is more important than ever now to come together to look out, celebrate and appreciate our differences considering what is happening in the world. The goal is to make Camden the safest borough in London for LGBTQ+ people to get support and services and have a sense of community.

Many of the attendees were LGBTQ+ people who come from a religiously conservative family who do not accept them or have threatened their safety. One of them noted that LGBTQ+ peoples' experiences of safety is vastly dependent on the religion and culture that they come from, and the varying levels of acceptance. A few people noted that having been excluded by their families, sessions like the Brave Café were so important to them because they provide their only sense of community, belonging, and emotional support. Attendees also noted that LGBTQ+ peoples' experiences of safety vary depending on their socioeconomic situation, with it being easier for affluent people. The idea of the 'mainstream'

LGBTQ+ community was discussed, and some attendees did not feel accepted or included by 'mainstream' LGBTQ+ people, which were defined as those who are affluent and white and attend bars and/or drink alcohol. Some referred to microaggressions that had they had faced from 'mainstream' LGBTQ+ people.

It was pointed out that public messaging is very important for dispelling myths and making LGBTQ+ people feel welcomed and safe. For example, one attendee noted that LGBTQ+ flags and signs saying that this is an LGBTQ+ inclusive space go a long way to show support and let people know that they are safe in these spaces. They also noted that there is a lack of drop-in spaces for people from the LGBTQ+ community who cannot trust the police or their families but are suffering from hate crime, homophobia, or abuse. A few attendees identified the need for an LGBTQ+ community centre to unite and bring all LGBTQ+ people from many different backgrounds together. Another identified the need for faith leaders to have training about LGBTQ+ issues, so that religious families and communities can be encouraged to be more accepting.

Attendees thanked Camden for organising the session and said that it was inspiring and rewarding to have the opportunity to share their experiences and suggest solutions to improve LGBTQ+ safety in the borough. Camden emphasised that we want to continue the conversation as this is just the beginning of trying to create positive change and develop collective community solutions.

8. Case Studies

Camden Event 4 – Understanding refugees, migrants, and asylum seekers



Public discourse and the media in the UK is filled with myths and misconceptions about refugees, migrants, and asylum seekers.

A lot of people do not understand the difference between refugees, migrants, and asylum seekers, so we discussed these groups and the fact that many refugees and asylum seekers have arrived at St Pancras in Camden, from Ukraine, Afghanistan and other war-torn countries. Camden Council has been building an organisational structure to best help these communities and has recently been awarded Borough of Sanctuary status.

Over 70 people attended this Brave Café session, many of whom were asylum seekers housed in Camden, who said that this was the first time they had felt their voices heard. They were grateful for the opportunity to share their experiences of arriving in this country. Many of them came here for survival because they had lost their home or safety, such as women from Afghanistan escaping the Taliban and people fleeing the bombing in Ukraine.

We discussed the widespread myth in the UK that refugees and migrants are ‘stealing our jobs’ or ‘stealing our benefits’, when the reality of the situation is that refugees and asylum seekers who come to this country are denied the right to work or receive any recourse to public funds for a very long time. The attendees explained that in their home countries they were highly qualified professionals and when they came to the UK their qualifications meant nothing, but they came here desperate to work and provide for their families as well as send money back home. They emphasised that they want to work but the system in the UK does not allow them to and does not even help them learn English until a long time after their arrival.

Attendees said they really enjoyed the session and were thankful that we organised it. They were keen to attend more sessions in future and were grateful to be able to share their opinions and meet a diverse group of people.

“ I never really thought about having a conversation... I would challenge in a confrontational way, but it’s about having a dialogue and really getting that other person to have a different idea about what asylum seekers might be doing here or whatever. That’s allowed to me think more about how I approach those conversations.” **Local resident, Camden**

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“ It made me realise just how much rumour and myth can be distorted into untruth and how easy it is to accept those if they fit into your own narrative... how you can learn to challenge some of that uncomfortableness and using empathy in all situations, so when you put yourself in someone else's shoe, even when you find that other shoe uncomfortable, like when it's a really bad pair of stilettos, it's really uncomfortable, but standing in that uncomfortable space to try to understand... hearing something you just have no idea about and how that can explode into something like what happened in Harehills [this summer]... and then being able to challenge that reality. Sometimes when things feel uncomfortable it's okay to sit in that uncomfortable space and then work out what your response might be from that. ”

M, Local resident, Seacroft, Leeds

9. Learnings

- 1** Participants in the sessions were positive about the challenging topics that were explored and emphasised that it was important to discuss things that are often avoided due to perceived controversy.
- 2** People also emphasised that this was one of the first time their voices had been heard in this kind of safe space.
- 3** In Camden, we received some feedback from stakeholders about ensuring that participants who may be triggered by the contents of the sessions are supported sensitively and effectively.
- 4** Leeds also received feedback to ensure that the voices of people with lived experience are included in each session. They noted the lack of female facilitators who identify as LGBTQ+ in the first session.
- 5** The unrest across the UK over the summer added some sensitivities and difficulties in terms of generating interest and responding appropriately to local sensitivities in both Camden and Leeds.
- 6** There were initial challenges experienced to encourage attendance to the Camden sessions. However, targeted in-person outreach with community leaders and influencers, and other council departments helped to inform Camden's decision to issue vouchers to residents to help with travel costs and incentivise attendance.
- 7** Participants in Leeds reflected on how their confidence in tackling local rumours had been negatively affected by the events of the summer. We received feedback that the sessions empowered them to use the anti-rumour methodology when faced with difficult conversations in their communities.
- 8** All stakeholders reflected on the importance of embedding these practices into future work, and the importance of these conversations being ongoing rather than ending with this project.
- 9** We have concluded that the Brave Space guidelines can be used as a good practice framework for future community engagement work, in the sense that participants welcomed the encouragement to have these difficult conversations at such a difficult time.
- 10** We are committed to continue to review and develop these guidelines and are aware that the guidelines may have to be adjusted to the societal context in individual cities.

9. Conclusion

The Brave Space Café sessions have been a great success in both Leeds and Camden, and we have received a range of positive feedback from participants and stakeholders. Both councils have seen this project as providing a test bed for more regular honest and effective intercultural discussions. The sessions have been seen as a clear example of good practice in community engagement, and a model that can be reflected upon and learned from going forward.

The bravery and openness of the participants in discussing the experiences of refugees, the complexities of domestic abuse, safety and greater understanding of LGBTQ+ people and the realities of racism within interracial communities, have been truly inspiring.

They also gave us an opportunity to dig deep into the roots of mistrust and rumours between communities. Participants in both Leeds and Camden welcomed the opportunity to have a range of ‘elephant in the room conversations’ and foster a deeper understanding, empathy, and solidarity among participants.

The sessions have equipped participants with knowledge, resources, and a renewed sense of responsibility to advocate for and support marginalised individuals within their communities.

The collaborative environment fostered by the Brave Space Cafés have strengthened community ties and created a network of allies committed to promoting inclusivity and equality.

10. Next Steps – Camden

It is crucial to build on the momentum generated by these sessions. Continued dialogue, education, and community engagement are not just important, but essential in addressing these critical issues and fostering a more inclusive and just society. The Brave Space Cafés have shown that we can confront the ‘elephants in the room’ through open conversation and collective action and drive meaningful change. Let’s not lose this momentum, but rather, let’s use it to propel us forward.

Camden plans to incorporate the lessons learned from new forms of community engagement embedded in the Brave Space Cafés sessions. We plan to continue to speak to our communities about difficult topics, ensuring everybody’s voices are heard and ensuring that we listen to people’s lived experiences. We plan to continue to collaborate and learn from our voluntary and community sector organisations and find new ways to tackle the challenges facing our communities.

10. Next Steps – Leeds

Leeds, Intercultural Cities, and City of Sanctuary: helping our networks and partnerships working together to benefit our diverse communities.

In addition to events such as these, Leeds has an extensive supporting programme of community engagement work, community safety initiatives, opportunities for dialogue, and partnerships with third sector partners. These are fundamental to the resilience and cohesion of the city's diverse communities.

The Anti-Rumour Methodology aligns with Leeds's existing Migration Strategy and our Social Cohesion Strategy which is in development, and the Brave Space guidelines act as a practical vehicle for us to drive key priorities forward. Priorities in the migration strategy include changing attitudes and behaviours, increasing awareness and understanding, to strengthen resilience and build capacity in communities, and continue with strong partnership approached. The work undertaken in this project has perfectly encapsulated these priorities, which are crucial to achieving our vision for Leeds to be a welcoming and compassionate city for new and existing communities, where people feel safe, connected, and valued.

This work also has strong ties to the principles and priorities within the social cohesion strategy, and the project has been shared with our leadership team. The key priorities for the social cohesion strategy are to create safe spaces for dialogue and build and promote good relations within our neighbourhoods.

The strategy includes plans to:

- support community and statutory partners to increase their capacity to hold difficult conversations on issues relating to intolerance, hate and extremism,
- engage community partners to help identify issues causing tensions,
- actively seek to engage widely across communities where tensions and issues exist going beyond 'community leaders
- empower local communities and partners in the delivery of events and activities to bring the community together, removing barriers and providing infrastructure and support where it is needed

This project has provided the opportunity to begin that work.

This joint project through Intercultural Cities has allowed Leeds and Camden to develop strong partnerships that will continue beyond the project. The Intercultural Cities Co-ordinators meeting in Portugal in November 2024 allowed further opportunity for networking, with colleagues from Leeds and Camden in attendance. They were able to provide an update on the project, which garnered interest from other cities across the globe. There is already a further meeting planned with colleagues from Leeds and Camden to exchange best practice on other areas of work including the City of Sanctuary movement and the No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) condition.

**For further information about
this project please contact:**

international.relations@leeds.gov.uk
or equalities@camden.gov.uk

