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The Shared Societies Project:
Leadership for Dialogue, Diversity and Social Cohesion
Building a world safe for difference

Replicable example of practice

Commitment IX

Promote respect, understanding and appreciation of cultural, religious and ethnic diversity and support local communities in exploring their identity, sharing their experiences with other identity groups and working together with those groups on common concerns

Suggested Approach:

- Initiate awareness programmes to encourage respect for difference. It should highlight the positive features of pluralism and diversity and the obligations of living in a shared society and building a shared future

Cross reference with Commitment VIII and X

Ćuprija (Bridge) International Youth and Heritage Summer Camp

Country: Bosnia-Herzegovina

Background

- Since the war in the early 1990s Bosnia-Herzegovina is very polarised.
- Stolac is a town which saw much conflict and the Muslim population left or was driven out. Now the population is made up approximately of 7000 Catholic Croats, 5000 Muslim Bosniacs and 400 Orthodox Serbs.
- Relationships are very tense and there have been many incidents which have raised the tensions: e.g the display of the illegal Herzegovina flag by Croats; tensions over the school; rebuilding of the old masques and plans to build a new mosque.
- Personal relations are also very polarised.
- The Stolac Youth Forum is a small youth group, made up mainly but not exclusively of Muslims, which promotes the idea of a common shared Bosnian identity rather than separate Bosniac, Croat and Serb identities and as such comes into conflict with the municipal authorities and leaders of the separate communities. It is related to another organisation: Society for Restoration of Civil Trust

Goals

- To build tolerance among young people from different backgrounds by installing in them a greater understanding and appreciation of the diversity and plurality of world cultures.
- To organise a summer camp and bring into the town people from other parts of the world
- To put the problems of Stolac in the context of the rest of the world and to connect young people in the town with young people (role models) else where
- To demonstrate living together in spite of difference
- Assist in rebuilding the town

Method

- Ćuprija is an integrated project including work, educational and recreational activities
- The group liaises with external bodies to recruit international volunteers for the project
- The group identifies sites where help was needed. These include the beautification of cultural monuments, work on a mosque, an orthodox church yard, a pre-Christian burial site and environmental work including the development of town garden spaces, as well as protection of local natural heritage along the river
- The project starts with a parade through the town creating a festive air and displaying the cosmopolitan nature of the project.
- In addition to work activities the participants take part in workshops and lectures. Gathering together around the common goals of the working programme, the young participants consider the possibility of understanding and applying different forms of tolerance and of strengthening their own background through solidarity with others from diverse backgrounds.
- Recreational activities include poetry readings, dancing, music, different games and inter - religious prayer and outings to sites of interest in order to achieve a higher level of community and sharing mutuality amongst the participants.
- The volunteers lived and worked together in 2006, a smaller number (30) took part in 2007 and the group (40 anticipated) will live in family homes in 2008

Impact

- The group feel liberated and affirmed
- The public have come out and supported them: e.g. Croat people brought coffee to the volunteers while they were doing reconstruction work

Enabling conditions

- The group is confident with many member young professionals.
- They have access to funding support for the project from the European Union and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development
- The project has partners in the Sarajevo based Forum Bosnia International and the Luxemburg Scot and Guide Association.

Comments

- The Youth Forum is willing to confront actions and attitudes which they believe are divisive and hinder the development of a common Bosnian identity and as such are often involved in controversy.
- At the same time they are dealing with concrete problems and demonstrating tangible ways in which people can work together and co-operate.
- There is a tension, of which they are aware, between the good will they gain from project such as Ćuprija and the hostility which arises from their campaigning work

Contact / References

Information can be obtained through http://www.cuprija.ba and www.ifbosna.org