

## Religious Views in SRE: Young People's faith forum - Newham



### Background

Newham is one of the most dynamic parts of the country. It has a youthful population, and there is an energy here that few other places can match. It is at the heart of one of the largest areas of urban redevelopment in Europe.

There are around 80,000 children and young people aged 19 or under in Newham. They make up 32% of the total population in the borough. This is the highest proportion of any area in the country. For comparison, across London as a whole children and young people are 25% of the population. The number of children and young people in Newham is an important feature of the area.

In the 2001 Census, Newham had the largest proportion of non-white ethnic groups in the country. Around 77% of children and young people were from these groups; the largest proportions were of Black African (17%) and Bangladeshi (14%) origin. However, the vast majority (85%) of Newham's 0-15 year olds were born in the UK. This diversity is also expressed in terms of faiths. In the 2001 Census, 47% of the population said they were Christian, 24% Muslim and 7% Hindu, with the rest of the population members of other faith groups or with no religious affiliation. Newham is also an area of high mobility.

Newham set up a Student Sacre in February 2005. The aim of this was to provide a place where students from different religious faiths and none could come together across all the secondary schools in Newham to discuss issues that are important to them in the area of faith and religion.

Gradually more schools and students have become involved in Student Sacre over the course of 2006-7, so that at present we have 13 schools involved out of our 15 secondary schools in the Borough. Having Student Sacre gives all schools a structured input into adult Sacre, ensuring that the voice of the child is given place in planning future policy and provision.

Student Sacre meets half termly, the students themselves set the agenda, and the RE advisor is there as a facilitator for what the students want to work on. In 2005 the group helped with the production of a Sacre advice paper to schools on 'Prayer rooms', as well as producing a letter to head teachers from themselves about the importance of visits to places of worship. Student Sacre gives young people in Newham a place to share, challenge, and put forward policy and practice on matters that are important to them. It

seeks to give them a qualitative experience to enable them to have a quantitative impact. The chair and secretary of the Student SACRE attend the adult SACRE meetings, and report back the issue/s the students are discussing or working on at present.

## Student SACRE Project



Ideas for this project started in December 2006, when some students from one of our secondary schools came to a Student SACRE meeting upset with the way some materials had been taught on relationships in their school. This opened up a general discussion about sex and relationships education (SRE) and what different experiences, representatives from our Newham secondary schools had had of their SRE. The students were very keen to help Michael Bath (SRE advisor for LB of Newham) and Claire Clinton (RE Advisor for LB of Newham) in

reviewing the present policy in the Borough. The students felt that there needed to be some materials that could be used in schools to bring faith views into the classroom when these topics were being covered, and their idea of producing a DVD arose.

The Student's wanted a DVD that would take their religious beliefs into account, as well as give what they thought about the issues. They believe that faith should play an integral role when teaching SRE in the classroom, something that teachers, advisors and agencies in Newham have been working towards together in developing faith sensitive SRE. Their interest and enthusiasm gave the LA (Local Authority) the opportunity to ensure that we had gathered and listened to their thoughts about the SRE, and their reactions to ideas we had to build upon the work done by many agencies and teachers in this area.

Newham and NASACRE have funded this work to be able to take place with student SACRE to produce materials to support Newham's policies on SRE. We would like to pay special thanks to Alternatives, Newham's Healthy Schools Team, Newham Asian woman's project, Newham's PSHE advisor and Shine for all the work that they have been involved with in previous years that have provided the foundations for this work with Student SACRE to build upon.

The work of Student SACRE has been part of a larger process going on within Newham. The LA has a group of faith representatives, working alongside professionals and voluntary agencies talking about how we can ensure that good quality SRE is taking place within faith communities, schools and the primary care trust. It is an exciting partnership that Student SACRE has been instrumental in being the catalyst for.

## The DVD

In the process of making this DVD there were over 80 young people filmed answering questions on this topic, and 15 faith representatives. We are very grateful for the partnership of schools, parents/guardians, faith representatives and students who have made this DVD possible.



On the DVD there are a range of different beliefs and opinions on relationships. Some of the young people on the DVD have religious beliefs, and some do not. It is interesting to note how much the young people and faith representatives share and value in the relationships they ideally would like in their lives.

It is hoped that this DVD will give resources for use in schools in teaching the SRE curriculum, providing the voice of some young people on relationships. The DVD has been made as a flexible resource in order that educators themselves can decide how best to use it, whether as lesson starters, or as a prompt to student discussion, as a training device for health professionals to gain an insight into students religious beliefs, or for use with young people wanting to investigate relationships outside of school.

The DVD aims to provide you with an insight into what different faith leaders and representatives in Newham believe about the same set of questions as the young people, so taking into account many of our young people's religious and cultural backgrounds that they bring to thinking about this topic.

The young people wanted a DVD that would also help those who deliver SRE in schools (whether that be teachers or health professionals), or deal with young people and their sexual health to understand their religious and cultural backgrounds.

### **Interested in seeing a little bit more?**

We have just set up a website, where you can download the booklet that accompanies the DVDs in order to see the complete contents, as well as view 3 clips of the students and faith representatives answering one of the many questions on the DVD. Also on the website you can read reviews from teachers, advisors and health professionals, plus order your own copy of the DVDs.

<http://secondary.newham.gov.uk/Student%20Sacre/StudentSacre.htm>

The project has taken up so much of my life over the last 2 years, but now we have got something made and published I feel all the effort was so worth it. My best moments throughout have been the students, their reactions and working alongside them – a real privilege in my professional life.

Claire Clinton  
RE Advisor for London Borough of Newham